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HE DID NOT VOUCHSAFE A GLANCE AT LILLIAN, WHO WAS KEENLY WATCHING THEM BOTH.

## A DAUGHTER OF EVE; Or, BLINDED BY LOVE.

BY MRS. MARY REED CROWELL,  
*Author of "A Bride of a Day," "Will She Marry Him?" etc., etc.*

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE FACE IN THE DRAWER.

THROUGH the open window came the faint perfume of early summer sweets, and the afternoon sunshine, falling in tessellated golden beauties over the carpet, lighted up with a halo of

glory the beautiful head bent over the hands that were clasped in a tight embrace.

Around the graceful, drooping figure swept folds of rich maize silk that was particularly becoming to the fair throat, face and arms, and contrasting well with the dusky hair that, unbound by comb or ribbon, fell loosely to the slender, supple waist, a rippling, darkening cloud.

She was very beautiful, very fair; and yet that rare face was shadowed by a frown that ought not to have been there, and in the dark, lustrous eyes was mirrored an expression that illly became them.

With a sudden gesture of impatience, she



arose from the low hassock, and began a rapid, restless promenade through the luxurious chamber.

Upon every object her eyes rested; now flashing as they noted the dainty elegance of carpet, curtains and furniture; now smiling scornfully as they dwelt upon the crystal ornaments of the dressing-bureau; whereon lay open caskets of glowing, bright-eyed jewels.

With closest and most earnest attention, Lillian Rothermel viewed the contents of this bedchamber, the plainest, probably, of all the apartments at Fernleigh; and then, as she deliberately paused before the mirror, her peach-bloom cheeks grew more vivid in their coloring, and her black eyes more intense in their half-scornful, half-triumphant light.

"It is all very elegant; all very suitable to my fastidious tastes, and I doubt whether many women would refuse it all, even if it did come at the awful price I am going to pay for it."

She stood steadily regarding the play of her own peerless features as she soliloquized.

"I have no need of denying to myself that I am a beautiful woman; and when a pretty face is all I possess, why should I not make the most of it? If it never brings me happiness, it shall give me riches, and influence, and satisfy my ambition."

She glanced casually out of the rose-hued curtained window, and then, with a mighty surge, came a tide of emotion over her white face and throat.

It was not an uncommon sight at all that she saw, but it evidently *was* one that bore a peculiar relation to her; for the scarlet flush died away, and as her face grew paler, her eyes filled with tears, and she moved away from the window.

Below, on the graveled walk, Lillian Rothermel had seen two gentlemen; one, a fine, portly man of perhaps sixty years of age, arrayed in the neatest, most elegant attire, with a face at once prepossessing and commanding.

He was Mr. Edward Clavering, the wealthy owner of Fernleigh and all its splendid accompaniments.

The other was years younger—a graceful, stylish-looking man, with an air of pride and independence that was peculiarly adapted to him.

He had a handsome face, with its dark-blue eyes and bronzed cheeks; its gravely-sweet mouth, with a thick, curling mustache of golden brown; his hair, curling in loose tendrils, brushed off his forehead.

It was on this attractive face that Lillian Rothermel had looked with scarlet-stained cheeks and quivering mouth.

Her eyes still dimmed with the unshed tears that trembled on the lashes, she opened a side-

drawer in her dressing-bureau and took therefrom a picture—painted on porcelain, and with a name written on the card that was attached to it.

The picture was a perfect likeness of the gentleman Lillian had seen below, walking with old Mr. Clavering, and the name on the card was Harry Gordeloup.

With a passionate tenderness Lillian caressed the unconscious trifle, and then, lifting it to her lips, kissed it fondly.

"Harry! Harry! you will never know how it is killing me to give you up; and yet—I shall do it!"

She removed the ring from her finger that Harry Gordeloup had placed there a year before, and tied it with a little black ribbon to a packet of letters addressed to him.

Then she laid the picture thereon, face down, that she might not meet the eyes that seemed following her wherever she went, and rung the bell for a servant to beg Mr. Gordeloup to await Miss Rothermel in the parlor.

She was intensely pale, and there seemed to her to be a tell-tale imp in her eyes as she gazed back at them; but Lillian Rothermel was a brave woman, and a determined woman, whose will wrought wondrous results; so that when she went down the broad stairs, she was tranquil, radiant, and graceful as ever.

## CHAPTER II.

### CAST ADRIFT.

MR. GORDELOUP met her at the foot of the stairs.

"I heard your step, Lillian; as if I could not tell it from any woman's in the world!"

He drew her arm in his, bending his head to kiss her forehead, as they entered the great, dim parlor.

"Harry, go sit there by the window while I talk to you. Have you a few minutes to spare?"

She smiled brightly at him.

"To *spare* for you, Lillian? You know my entire life is at your disposal."

He seated himself closely beside her, instead of occupying the chair by the window that Lillian had pointed out.

With tender affection, Harry took one of her hands, and asked what favor he could do her.

Then, with a calm quiet in her voice, and her eyes firmly meeting his own, she told him why she had appointed the interview.

"Harry, I want you to promise me you will not hate me, because I am going to break our engagement—"

Gordeloup sprung to his feet in the suddenness of this revelation.

"*Break our engagement!*"

She smiled calmly at his flushed face; his



eyes, that held such a questioning, surprised light in them.

"I am too poor, Harry, to allow you to be burdened with me; you are obliged to earn your living; what would we do?"

He was standing perfectly still, earnestly regarding her witching face, his own wearing an expression of bewildered amazement.

"Lillian, dearest, what does this mean? You knew a year ago my financial condition, and I yours."

"That is true; and because I think it best for us both, I shall release you from your engagement to me."

A wounded look was in his face now, but Lillian would not see it—or seeing, would take no visible notice of it.

"Lillian, if you have ceased to love me—"

She involuntarily exclaimed some inaudible sound, that to Harry's ears was a denial.

"Then, my own Lillian, if you have had no cause to dislike me, we will banish this dismal subject, and I will forget that you said you desired to release me. Besides, Lillian," and he lifted her chin and kissed her red lips, "I am very sure I'd not be thrown over like that."

A little shiver ran through Lillian's veins; what a pitiless task was hers, to tell this loving, trusting man, who had confided to her the guidance of his life, who looked to her for all happiness, that she was going to give him up; deliberately reject him because a richer man had offered a higher price for her beauty!

How she despised herself, as she waited the one moment before she cruelly deceived him; and above the contempt she felt for herself, the pity she experienced for him, was the tearing, crushing agony of the knowledge that she worshiped this man, who was to her a very god.

And yet, with strange inconsistency, she would not let herself be happy in his love; would seek her joy in the wealth and influence she would obtain when she became Edward Clavering's wife, and mistress of Fernleigh, where she had been only a hired companion to Miss Amy Clavering.

Here, under this very roof, Lillian Rothermel had met Harry Gordeloup; under the auspices of Mr. Clavering and kind-hearted Miss Amy, their courtship had thriven apace, until, dazed by her beauty, her stylish elegance—shall we acknowledge, by her consummate artfulness?—Mr. Clavering had suddenly proposed for her hand, with a full knowledge of her engagement to Harry Gordeloup.

Well—we have learned the result of that proposal to Lillian Rothermel, who, in the moment of silence that intervened as she sat there with her lover's arm around her, had thought rapidly of all these things.

Perhaps her indomitable will failed her for

that moment; the next, and she was ready for the cruel deed.

"Harry, you misunderstood me. Let me be plain, if I necessarily be harsh. Remember, I—in short, Harry, I am going to marry Mr. Edward Clavering."

Her tones never varied from their low, steady cadence; her cheeks did not flush or pale; her eyes looked Harry quietly in his own.

Harry dropped her hand and confronted her, a stormy anguish in his eyes.

"Lillian! you surely are but trying the depth of my love for you! You marry Edward Clavering? Why, dearest, he is old enough to be your father! Lillian, how foolish I was to be so frightened."

She did not return the tender, wistful, yet withal doubtful smile that parted his lips, and when she spoke, her hard, heartless tones rung a knell to Harry Gordeloup's heart.

"I repeat, I release you because I wish to marry Mr. Clavering. I have quite decided that to be mistress of Fernleigh is preferable to struggling on, on an income of two thousand a year."

A sudden cry of horror came from Harry.

"Lillian! for money you will deliberately break my heart and ruin my prospects! Oh, Lillian, do unsay those wicked, mercenary words!"

She smiled in his pale, eager face.

"For money, as you say, Harry, I will do it. But, don't talk about your heart breaking—it is as strong as mine, is it not?"

"Oh, Lillian! Lillian!"

It was all the reproach he made, but the tone in which he uttered the name was inexpressibly touching and pitiful.

"Besides," she went on, as she carelessly, almost gayly tapped her fingers against the little package she had brought down for him, "as to ruining your prospects by refusing to share them, I think you are just enough to acknowledge I would only be a burden. Again, accustomed as I am to the luxury and ease of my life at Fernleigh, I fear I should be very unwilling to resign it for—"

"For the terrible position of the wife of a man you disliked because he was in only moderate circumstances."

Harry had interrupted her with sharp, unnatural voice, and she wondered if it really could be gay Harry Gordeloup who spoke so sternly.

But it was better that he should feel angry; better than that wounded grief he had at first displayed.

"We will not discuss this point further. Here are your letters and picture; of course I wish mine. Mr. Gordeloup, you surely will be able to appreciate my candor some day



when you learn to regard Mrs. Clavering as a very good friend; when you return to your old-time love, and renew your vows to Winnie St. Cyr."

A sudden, painful flush tinted his cheek; then he bent his face to Lillian.

"You remind me how you won me from her? Let me remind you why *you* have been won from *me*. Miss Rothermel, I accept my release. May you find in the wealth for which you barter your womanhood, the enjoyment you desire; but if ever aught should transpire to prove to you the sin you this day commit, remember how *I* am made to suffer."

He bowed elaborately, and took the parcel from her hands, then walked out of the room.

It was all over! and Lillian Rothermel, with a gasp and a fierce pressing of her heart, smiled after him!

### CHAPTER III.

#### A KNIGHT TO THE QUEEN.

WHEN Harry Gordeloup went out from Lillian Rothermel's presence, it was with strangely commingled emotions; foremost and most painful of which was the knowledge—so pitiful, so humiliating—that he had been thrown over, not for love that Lillian bore another, not for dislike that she bore him, but for money, *money!* Lillian had sold herself, and bartered him for Edward Clavering's broad acres and elegant mansion.

He walked along the roadside, hating Edward Clavering with a fierce sort of jealousy in that he had won his love from him; and he compressed his lips as he pictured to his indignant imagination, Edward Clavering's arms around Lillian Rothermel, and his lips touching the rare red mouth *he* had so often kissed, so reverently too; for he had not alone loved Lillian Rothermel; he had held her in a sort of tender worship—the chivalrous affection such men as Harry Gordeloup always bestow on a woman they love.

Harry was of a very strange disposition; he possessed a commingling of characteristics that were seldom met with; whether his life was made the happier by them—these conflicting traits of his—I question; but at the same time he was a man of true nobility of soul, as far as principle went; and those impulses of his were not intended to govern his life, although he too often allowed them to.

So much for Harry Gordeloup, handsome, attractive and refined; and at the moment he was walking along the sunny roadside, that warm, clear day, very much wounded, angered and insulted, he thought of Lillian Rothermel, her witching beauty and dainty ways, and his

heart sunk; he remembered the usage she had given him, and his cheeks glowed, and, almost involuntarily, another face—sad, haunting, pleading—rose before him. Then he realized how Winnie St. Cyr must have suffered when he went to her so deliberately, and yet so kindly, to tell her he had learned to love another; would she give him up?

That was one of Harry Gordeloup's straightforward peculiarities; to him it was less a wrong-doing to go to Winnie St. Cyr, and plainly tell her all the truth, than suffer her to go on loving him, and caressing him, and the while his whole soul shrinking from the duplicity he would enact, and crying out for Lillian Rothermel.

So he had told Winnie—his bright, sunny Winnie—than whom no truer woman lived; she had listened to his story, and, with quivering lips and trembling fingers, spoke his release and gave him back his ring—the ring that now lay in his hand—that Lillian Rothermel had returned to him an hour ago!

A great pang throbbed through his heart as he looked down on it; he was beginning, even so soon, to find the fruit he had thought so good, so sweet, turning to Dead Sea apples even in his own hands.

Lillian Rothermel was very lovely, very beautiful, and she had loved him; he knew that; he had loved her, too, really, truly; as well as ever he had loved Winnie St. Cyr; but now the question would still keep forcing itself to him, had he done well in transferring his heart from Winnie's tender keeping to Lillian's fair hands?—he thought, fair and merciless as the grave were those white hands, and that heart of hers.

He had walked more than two miles, through the warm sun and dust, before he turned to retrace his steps.

He could not get back to the city for several hours, were he so inclined; besides, why should he fly Fernleigh; *he* had not done this wrong; Lillian's was the blame, and he almost acquitted Edward Clavering that moment. She had won him against his conscience, perhaps, even as she had deliberately stole him, a willing prize, from another.

No, he could face Lillian Rothermel just as stubbornly as she could meet him; he would go to Mr. Clavering and congratulate him; he would laugh and talk to dear old Miss Amy, and let Lillian see his heart was as elastic as hers.

He walked more leisurely as he neared the entrance-gate at Fernleigh; he switched off the grass with his cane in a careless sort of way; he stopped and plucked a spray of late roses, and fastened them in his button-hole; and all this because he imagined Lillian might be peeping at him from some closed lattice.



He was a little conceited—we all are—and proud; and he resolved to fight it through with these weapons.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### AN OLD MAN'S LOVE.

HARRY went up the high flight of marble steps that led to the hall, two or three at a jump—he remembered Lillian had reproved him once, very merrily, lest he should make a misstep—through the hall, and, leaving his hat, cane and gloves on the stag's antlers, went up to his room to renovate his toilet and make himself fresh for the dinner-table.

But, with it all, what a dull, heavy, tearing pain was in his heart! He kept thinking of Lillian all the time; thinking how he had lost her; how suddenly it had come to pass that he had no right to lay his hands on her bright hair, and look down into her eyes, until the rich color came to her cheek!

After he had arranged his dress, he sat down by the bowed shutters, to await the ringing of the dinner-bell—wondering what Lillian would wear down to the table. He always liked a black grenadine she wore, with no ribbons—only her heavy gold jewelry; Mr. Clavering had several times complimented her upon her appearance when she wore white, and blue trimmings. Directly a door opened opposite his—that was her room, and his heart sprung to his throat when he heard her skirts rustle over the velvet carpeting.

He heard her walk to the banister, and then, after a silence, call, in a clear, high voice:

"Carman"—Carman was the footman—"will you send some one to repair the bell-rope in my room? And just step to the library and tell Mr. Clavering I will see him in a few minutes."

Then she walked back past his door, humming an air from "Les Brigands." Ah! Harry had taken her down only a week before to hear that very opera!

How heartless she was! how utterly heartless!

He forgot how he came up the walk from the gate; how he had picked the white roses—had it been only accidental?—the only kind of flowers Lillian had expressed a dislike for.

So she was going down to tell Mr. Clavering, he supposed, that she loved him so dearly and would accept his offer—not of gold and lands and sixty-five years of life—but his heart, and hand, and protection.

Of a sudden, he resolved to go down-stairs, to the library, and see her when she came in, in all her beauty and regal grace.

With him to think was to act; he threw open his door, began whistling the same aria Lillian had sung, and then went leisurely down the stairs.

The library door was wide open—a sort of mute invitation, it seemed to him, to her upstairs to enter—but he went boldly in, up to Mr. Clavering, who was reading in his easy-chair beside the long, velvet-covered table.

He glanced up—a little suddenly, Harry thought, but it was easily accounted for. Harry drew a short ottoman from a corner, and threw himself lazily, and not ungracefully, upon it.

"You can spare me a few moments, Mr. Clavering? I am aware you expect Miss Rothermel in a short time, but what I want to say can be said before she comes."

He waited a moment, looking at the slight expression of momentary discomfiture on the old gentleman's face.

"Yes, Harry, I know why you seek me before Lil—Miss Rothermel comes. I know I have taken her from you, my boy, and, viewed in some lights, I think it was a decidedly unfriendly thing. But just bear this in mind, Harry, I am an old man, and she is the only woman who ever moved my heart to love. You are young, with a long life ahead of you, and you can take your choice from a hundred who would never look at an old man like me."

"But you forget that, added to your personal attractions, Mr. Clavering, is all this."

Harry waved his hand, indicating the wealth that surrounded him, both inside and outside.

Mr. Clavering's cheeks flushed indignantly.

"You would insinuate that she would marry me for my riches? You must not let your natural disappointment make you scandalous, Harry."

A little contemptuous smile curled Harry's lip, but he would not tell the old man that Lillian *did* intend to marry him for his money, and nothing *but* his money. No, she was lost to him, and Mr. Clavering might find it out himself how bitter his mistake had been.

"To prove to you how mistaken you are, Harry, my boy, I will whisper a secret to you. I have made my will this very day, before I know her answer—though I can guess it—leaving to Lillian *Rothermel*, in the event of my rejection, five thousand dollars a year as long as she lives; and to my wife, if I marry, just double that sum, besides some of the estate."

Harry slowly raised his eyebrows; and then a horrible, hellish thought flashed through his mind.

What if Mr. Clavering should die, and Lillian be free?

He almost cursed himself the next moment for it; yet there was a red gleam on his face, as he arose and went toward the door.

"You see, Harry, how much I love her. You young men that can fancy every pretty



face, and would marry the first handsome girl who'd have you, know nothing of the love of the old man's heart. And, Harry, I'll give you a check for five thousand dollars to compensate."

But Harry was gone; he had not heard the offer, almost insulting in its inconsistency.

## CHAPTER V.

### THRUST FOR THRUST.

BEFORE Harry Gordeloup had reached the door of the library that led to the hall, a faint, sweet fragrance heralded Lillian Rothermel's approach. He gave a sudden start, and then fiercely steeled himself for the brief sight of her.

He saw her first; for her queenly head was bowed and her fingers were deftly fastening a cluster of geranium leaves and several carnation pinks, to her bodice.

Harry stood still, watching her; looking at the trailing white puffed dress, with a wide blue silken sash knotted about her waist; a blue ribbon and white lace *bache* in her purple black hair.

Then she raised her head slowly, with a smile hovering on her lips; she saw him, and the smile froze to an expression of surprise.

But there was not a vestige of embarrassment in her manner, appearance of language.

"Oh, Mr. Gordeloup! I suppose Mr. Clavering is in the library? How delightfully cool the air is growing."

So ladylike, so utterly forgetful! and yet there was a latent glow in her black eyes, and a deeper bloom on her cheeks than usual.

But Harry thought, in the second he stood without answering, it was natural, under the circumstances.

"Yes, it will be pleasant this evening, I think. You will find the old gentleman in the library."

He would have passed on, but she stretched out her arm—oh, how exquisite it was! with the open sleeve falling away above the elbow.

"How is this to be? Are you angry with me? I am very sure I am not with you."

There was the same luring melody in her voice that had taught him to forget Winnie St. Cy., the same, no doubt, that had won the wealth of Edward Clavering. How he hated it, when he heard it, and knew it was for him no more!

"Angry? No. Miss Rothermel, I will pass."

There came a quick, angry gleam to her eyes again.

"Because I have done what was best, you insist on this haughty coldness? We might as well be friends—at least while we remain in the same house."

"I will not trouble the old man's house long, Miss Rothermel. After it passes into *your* hands, rest assured I shall, never."

He was getting the best of her. They both knew that, every moment they stood there. Harry thought of it, with a proud anguish—for he loved her yet, in a vague, hateful way.

She realized it with wrath, that she had depended on her olden power over him, and had failed so signally.

"When it passes into my hands, as you say, you will be afforded no opportunity to trouble Mr. Clavering and myself. As it is, I think when you learn Miss St. Cyr is hourly expected, you may alter your arrangements."

Harry knew by her bitterly sarcastic manner, that she expected him to be crushed, discomfited by the mention of that name; plainly as though she had declared her tactics, he knew she intended to drive him from Fernleigh, before Miss St. Cyr came, as a punishment for his ascendancy over her; and because she thought he would blush to meet her.

But Harry was equal to the occasion; he forced a sudden surprised light to his eyes.

"Is *that* so? I would not miss seeing Winnie for all the attractions outside Fernleigh."

Lillian bit her lip; he was so invulnerable—he even called her "Winnie!" and how unspeakably handsome he was—and, how she worshiped him that very moment!

Her jealousy—poor, weak woman that she was, came flaming to her lips.

"I dare say there will be no trouble in renewing the old relations. Perhaps you will crawl back to her?"

"Perhaps," he said, lightly, and turned on his heel, and left her standing there, utterly routed—defeated.

She compressed her lips so tightly that the blood receded, leaving them white and ghastly; a dull underglow of red was shining through the dusk of her eyes; then, no sound escaping her, she went on into the library; her face returning to its customary aristocratic delicateness and sweetness of expression.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A WOMAN'S ART.

LILLIAN glided softly in, so noiselessly that the old gentleman did not hear her.

She laid her soft, warm hands on his eyes, and then laughed.

Mr. Clavering threw down the volume, and took her hands in his own, looking eagerly up in her face.

"And this is my answer, Lillian?"

"If you can interpret it—yes."

He let go her hands, and drawing her nearer him with his arm around her slender waist, kissed her cheek.



"I am not versed in the art of love-making, Lillian, but if the remainder of my days be devoted to your happiness, surely you will forgive the awkwardness of an old man? But, Lillian! beautiful Lillian, I love you—I certainly love you better than all the world beside. And do you love me? can it be possible that *you*, so young, so charming, love me?"

She bent on him a look of mingled tenderness and reproach.

"Mr. Clavering, you do me injustice to harbor the possibility of such a thought. What better proof can I give of my respect and affection than by vowing to become your wife?"

"None! none! Then you are my betrothed, Lillian? And I may name an early day, a *very* early day, for our marriage?"

"That decision may rest with you, Mr. Clavering. I am ready at any time."

"Because I want to see you the mistress of Fernleigh, Lillian—miserably poor return though it is for all your goodness to me—because I often am so lonely and cheerless, do I want you, my darling."

She smiled brightly.

"You will not have an opportunity of indulging in gloom when I shall have taken possession of you."

Her fondness seemed to touch his heart.

"Your womanly tenderness is *such* a prize. Lillian, do you know my heart aches for poor Harry—"

But she laid her fingers over his lips.

"No, Mr. Clavering, I will not allow you to mention that little romance of mine. Suffice it, that Mr. Gordeloup and I are entirely contented with the change of programme. Now, you will remember? or I shall show you still further what a terrible despot I am."

He kissed her hand caressingly.

"I never knew before how delicious a government a despotism could be."

"Then I've another command to issue. Will you agree to do what I request, blindly?"

"Blindly, my tyrant."

"Then," she said, dropping her bantering tone, and assuming one of kind, thoughtful seriousness, "it is regarding Miss St. Cyr. Miss Amy told me at lunch, she would be here to-day, very probably, and I see, from various reasons, that she and Mr. Gordeloup will be thrown very much together. I feel afraid Miss St. Cyr will endeavor to accomplish a renewal of the old relations between herself and Mr. Gordeloup. Now, I think it would be a wise arrangement; although I have learned from Miss Amy that you desire Winnie to marry Mr. Alvanley—that you never approved of her engagement to Harry."

"Yes, that is true; Winnie has really been promised to Lester Alvanley since she was a child. I desire that match above all things."

There came a sparkle to Lillian's eyes, that Mr. Clavering could not see; but her voice was just as gentle as ever.

"Then, since *you* wish it, dear Mr. Clavering, it shall be my purpose to have you obeyed—as it shall ever be my duty and pleasure to do."

Mr. Clavering smiled, delightedly.

"Do this, my Lillian, and I will never forget it! Make it your business to acquaint Winnie with my wishes; tell her I will dower her nobly the day she marries Lester Alvanley. Only, Lillian, dearest, there must be no coercion, you know. I love the child far too well to force her into a distasteful marriage."

"That would be terrible! No, Mr. Clavering, she must exercise her own will; my duty shall consist in convincing her judgment."

"Exactly. I will telegraph to Alvanley to come down for a month, and also talk to Harry about it. Harry's a fine fellow, Lillian; I wonder you could give him up for—"

Again the little white hand went playfully to his lips.

"You don't remember, sir. Once for all, Mr. Clavering, Harry Gordeloup is not to be compared with you!"

Her face was turned toward the open window, but the tones declared the comparison in her suitor's favor.

But those eyes—those dusk-red eyes—could Mr. Clavering have read their secrets, he would not have been flattered.

Suddenly Lillian concentrated her gaze upon a carriage driving up the road.

"It is the Fernleigh coach, Mr. Clavering—yes, I see there is a lady within. Miss St. Cyr, I presume. Now, I will go see if her room is all ready. I will meet you at dinner, Mr. Clavering."

He clasped her in his arms and kissed her; when she turned to go away, a superb cluster diamond ring was blazing on her fore-finger. She raised it to her lips, and with a smile at him, she hastened up to her room, and from the bowed shutters looked down on the young girl as she alighted from the coach; a strange, strange surveillance it was, too!"

## CHAPTER VII.

### WINNIE ST. CYR.

A PETITE figure, of exquisitely molded proportions; hair of brightest brown, tinted with rich golden bronze shades—long, lustrous hair, curled in a loose thick mass at the back of her head, and arranged *a la Pompadour* in front; eyes of a rare, violet hue, long in form and slumbrous in expression, with full white lids fringed with glittering lashes; a complexion



that suggested ruby wine flung on the purest snow.

That was Winnie St. Cyr, as she alighted from the carriage at the door, and walked up the flight of marble steps.

A wondrously fair girl, with quiet, retiring manners, full of inbred culture and refinement; a trifle cold in her general demeanor, and very sensitive.

That was Lillian Rothermel's rapid mental description of her, as she went away from her window.

"She is dangerous; she shall marry Lester Alvanley!"

And she went gracefully down-stairs to meet Miss St. Cyr, wondering if Harry had seen her yet.

But she was a moment too late; for Miss Winnie had just gone into the room assigned her—"her room," she called it, the one she always occupied when visiting at Fernleigh.

At the door she dismissed the maid, and turning the key, sat weariedly down in a comfortably-padded chair.

Fernleigh was no strange place to her; her very earliest memories were of this same room, where she could just remember seeing her invalid mother sitting by the window that commanded such a view of the swelling hills and winding river.

Then Mrs. St. Cyr had died, and Mr. Clavering, who, for her dead father's sake—one of Mr. Clavering's earliest friends—had given her mother a home to die in, had promised to see that her little Winfred should be educated so that she might be prepared to earn her own living when she grew old enough.

So the years went on, and little Winnie St. Cyr had grown to girlhood; a fair, sweet girl, too, with a complete education, a warm, tender heart, full of lasting gratitude to Mr. Edward Clavering, and possessed of a womanly independence that could not accept the offer to make Fernleigh her home.

So she went forth, earnest, brave and strong, to wrest from the world what it owed her—what it owes us all, and will pay us all, if we are but courageous enough to demand it boldly; if we are but strong enough and brave enough to go out to the fight with industry, economy and prudence for our weapons.

Winnie St. Cyr had been thus fortunate; she had at the very first found a congenial mode of life as children's private instructress in the family of Mrs. Dr. Florestan; success, a comfortable income; all reasonable happiness had come to her—except—

She had loved Harry Gordeloup so; with all the purity, tenderness and depth of her exquisite nature; he had been her sun, her king, her very life—and now, as she sat alone in the cool, darkened room at Fernleigh, where her

mother had died, she thought how bitter a desolation had swept over her.

It had all happened so suddenly; it was hardly three years since she had first seen him—how well she remembered it!

He had come to Dr. Florestan's, one day, on business relating to his profession—Harry was an architect and Dr. Florestan was about to build a new reception office; she had seen him, while she and little Jessie were passing out for a walk. When she came back, Mrs. Florestan, who had come down with a woman's curiosity to learn about the new addition, had discovered he was the son of one of her teachers at the institute, years ago, and had introduced them.

That was the propitious beginning; their acquaintance developed into friendship; then blossomed into love, while Dr. Florestan and his wife smiled and approved, and invited Winnie's lover as often as she did herself.

Then came the plans of that splendid town mansion of Mr. Clavering, that, through Winnie's loving schemes, were executed by Mr. Gordeloup, who, of course, was necessitated to frequent business trips to Fernleigh, sometimes alone, sometimes with Winnie.

Then Miss Rothermel had suddenly come to Fernleigh. Harry met her one day, and Mr. Clavering, who had conceived a strong attachment for the skillful, handsome young fellow, and made a friend of him, introduced the two.

Just at that time, one of the little Florestans being taken ill, Winnie was, at her own and the child's request, constituted nurse; for eleven weeks she never left the house, seeing Harry only at blissful, snatched minutes when Daisy slept.

Then, little by little, she grew to wondering what ailed Harry; and, before she fairly had time to inquire into it, he told her all.

Poor, stricken Winnie! as she thought of it now, with the woman under the roof who had wrought her her heart-ache, she wondered if she ever would get used to it all?

She did not come to Fernleigh of her own free will; Dr. Florestan's family had gone to the White Mountains for a month, and since she refused to join the party, she promised to rest and recuperate at Fernleigh.

She had never told Mrs. Florestan, or the doctor, of Harry's wholesale jilting of her, though they often rallied her on account of her quiet ways and subdued smile. She had not felt it to be right to subject him she loved, and ever would love, to the severe judgment she knew he merited.

As to his being at Fernleigh, she never thought; of course, since he was betrothed to this wondrously beautiful Miss Rothermel, whom she had never seen as yet, he would often run down from the city; but on these occasions she thought it would be a remarkably



easy thing to retire to her room and remain there. Of Lillian Rothermel's treachery to Harry Gordeloup, and her engagement to Mr. Clavering, she was perfectly ignorant; of only one fact was she sure—she loved Harry Gordeloup as dearly as before he had deserted her for Lillian Rothermel's beautiful self.

With a pride she could not help, she determined to show herself to Miss Rothermel to the very best advantage. If Harry had given her up for another, that other should know she was as worthy of him as the present *fiancee*. So Winnie laid out the dress Harry Gordeloup had so often declared was exquisitely lovely. When she was dressed, she went alone downstairs, to find Miss Amy and Mr. Clavering.

A slender, graceful figure was arranging flowers in a tall crystal vase; the library, otherwise, was empty.

Lillian—for it was she—turned quickly around.

"This is Miss St. Cyr? I know you by intuition, I suppose. I am Miss Lillian Rothermel."

She extended her hand cordially, and Winnie thought how surpassingly beautiful she was when she smiled. Harry couldn't have helped it, poor fellow!

She gave her warm white fingers to Lillian, who caressed them in a mute, welcome sort of way.

"I am glad to see you, Miss Rothermel—indeed, I always have been curious to do so, and now I am at Fernleigh for my vacation, I hope we will become very well acquainted."

"Indeed, I earnestly desire it. Miss Amy has spoken of you so much and so praisefully, I am sure I shall find great pleasure in being your friend."

Somehow, a pang shot through Winnie's heart. So it was Miss Amy who had prepared Miss Rothermel to know and admire her? She had hoped, in vague a way, that Harry had spoken kindly of her!

But this rival—this crowned rival, Winnie thought her—must not see her take note of this chance remark.

If she had but known it was a cautious, well-aimed blow, and that the result was as patent to Lillian as it was painful to herself!

"Miss Amy is the dearest old lady! I hope I will find her well, and Mr. Clavering?"

"Oh, yes, they are both enjoying good health, and are anxious to see you. We will find them in the garden, I think, with our guests. We have two or three friends staying at Fernleigh, and I believe Mr. Clavering is anticipating more."

The faint color surged to Winnie's face—it was Harry who was coming, then! But she answered lightly:

"Fernleigh is such a delightful place that all Mr. Clavering's friends are fortunate."

"Indeed, yes. And now will you go with

me in search of our host and hostess, Winnie? You see, I am resolved to be friendly."

Winnie forced a smile.

"I am grateful; are you ready to go?"

Lillian passed her arm through Winnie's, and the two walked leisurely down the flower-bordered path.

At the fountain, where the road suddenly made a sharp curve, they heard footsteps.

There, breaking abruptly upon them, was Harry Gordeloup!

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE MEETING IN THE GARDEN.

IF, with all her consummate tact, Lillian Rothermel had arranged a meeting between the two, it could not have been more satisfactory to her; and, surprised as she was herself, she was enabled to conceal it.

Harry involuntarily stepped back; then, instantly reassuming an easy, indifferent air, raised his hat gallantly.

"I beg pardon, Miss St. Cyr; this is as pleasant as unexpected. I am glad you have joined us at Fernleigh."

He did not vouchsafe a glance at Lillian, who was keenly watching them both.

For an instant Winnie's heart gave such fearful leaps she seemed to suffocate; then, by some superhuman power, she concealed all signs of her sudden agitation; and, save by a quivering of the fingers Lillian held, she would never have guessed the emotion the girl experienced.

"Thank you, Mr. Gordeloup. I am surprised to see you here, as well."

Her voice was low and perfectly even, and she looked up at him as she spoke.

"Then Mr. Clavering did not tell you? Although I expect to return in a day or so."

"I have not seen him yet. Miss Rothermel, perhaps you mentioned it, and I did not take notice."

Winnie turned to Lillian, with a certain dim idea that matters were wrong between her and Harry.

"I hardly know whether I did or not, Winnie. One in my position has so many things to think of. While I remember it, dear, your old friend, Mr. Alvanley, is coming to-morrow."

Lillian watched the effect of her announcement with secret exultation.

"Mr. Alvanley! to Fernleigh! I am very sorry."

But her face was growing scarlet under the keen glances of Lillian's eyes, no less than the regards of Harry that she felt were fixed on her.

"Oh, well, you needn't mind, Winnie. We all know the delightful little secret—Ah! there's Mr. Clavering now. Excuse us, Mr. Gordeloup."



She hurried Winnie away, and left Harry to return to the house, or wherever he saw fit, with that false representation in his ears.

"Mr. Alvanley! a delightful little secret! What could it mean unless a love affair? Who was this fellow who was coming to Fernleigh? He would like to choke him, anyhow!"

Poor Harry! The sight of those two women—the one whom he had jilted, so fair and pure, and the one who had thrown him over, so haughty and sarcastic—had aroused strange feelings in his heart.

Why should *he* care whom Winnie St. Cyr married? She was nothing to him, and never would be, for never while he lived would he go back to her whom he had so outraged, and ask to be reinstated.

But there was an unaccountable feeling in his heart—he had been so unmercifully cruel to Winnie, and she was so pretty and womanly. Well, Lillian Rothermel had paid him up for it; and he took a savage satisfaction in the thought.

They were intimate, at any rate, then, for she had called her Winnie; he supposed she would tell her every thing—women always did. He almost hoped she would, for then, perhaps, Winnie would pity him, and somehow Winnie's sympathy would have been very sweet just then.

Not that Harry was re-falling in love with Winnie St. Cyr; nothing was further from his thoughts; but he had been so unrooted in his confidence in Lillian Rothermel; he had been so wounded to the very depths of his nature; and there is no other time when a soul goes yearning for sympathy as when it is crushed and bruised.

Harry knew the kind of pity Winnie would have poured in his soul had he been wounded in any other cause, and was still true to her. He longed for some kind word, but he knew it could not come from her, whom he had so hurt.

No, he had not the vaguest dream of a renewal of old relations with her, even when he had said "perhaps," to Lillian, that afternoon.

The truth was, he loved this false, ambitious woman as well, in a different sort of way, as he had done a week before. People who love as he did cannot smother it all at once, though their pride may quench the flames little by little, until reason can come to the rescue, and at one well-directed blow dash the smoldering firebrands in every direction, never to be lighted more.

He turned around at the door to watch the two women; they were just turning the curve by the rose arbor; then he went in and threw himself down on the sofa in the reading-room.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE SHADOW ON THE PATH.

LILLIAN and Winnie had walked on in perfect silence after they had gone on from Harry.

Then Winnie, with pained reproach in her eyes and voice, turned to Miss Rothermel.

"Why did you not prepare me for that? Besides, had I known Lester Alvanley was coming, I would have gone to the mountains."

A sparkle came to Lillian's eyes.

"I thought you knew Harry was here; and had I dreamed my careless announcement was so distressing, surely I would not have made it. I understood you and he were engaged."

Winnie exclaimed, angrily!

"Miss Rothermel! *you* of all others should know I am not engaged to any one, much less *him*. I cannot so soon forget."

"That I was cruel, Winnie, you mean?"

"I had rather not discuss it, please. Mr. Clavering, I am so delighted!"

She broke away from Lillian to greet Mr. Clavering.

"You are in time to congratulate me, too, Winnie," he said, after an exchange of compliments, and glancing at Lillian as he spoke.

"Upon what, sir?"

"Has she not told you that she is going to make me the happiest of men? Surely, Lillian, you told her of our approaching marriage?"

Winnie uttered a little cry of astonishment.

Lillian laughed at her evident dismay.

"I was reserving that important item till the second day's acquaintance."

"But—but I thought—I always understood it was to be Har—Mr. Gordeloup."

Her words were freighted with painful surprise.

"No. Mr. Gordeloup changed his mind once upon a time, so I felt a perfect liberty in following his example."

Winnie winced under the calm, almost merciless tones.

"So you'll not even kiss me for the news, Winnie?"

Mr. Clavering held out his arms to embrace her, but she only stood still, paling and crimsoning by turns, glancing at Lillian's immobile face, that seemed to transform to a very Medusa head before her; at Mr. Clavering, so old, so noble, so unsuspecting; at the house, whither poor Harry had gone on alone.

It rushed over her in an overwhelming torrent: this woman, whom she despised from this moment, had broken her Harry's heart for Mr. Clavering's money; and the dear, kind old man was blind to it all!

"Perhaps Miss St. Cyr does not approve?"



Lillian's cold, even tones broke the absorbing reverie, and Winnie turned to the old gentleman with all the impulsiveness of her nature.

"Mr. Clavering! Mr. Clavering, I do *not* approve! I am sure it is wrong for her to want to marry you when you are so old—forgive me, my dear, kind friend! but there is Harry's heart she has trodden on to reach your money—oh, Miss Amy! do *you* think it right?"

A cloud, dark as thunder, was on Mr. Clavering's forehead.

"Winfred! you forget yourself! I must beg an ample apology of this lady, who, in one week, will be my wife."

"A week!" repeated Winnie, unheeding the request; and then Lillian spoke:

"I beg you will overlook her language, Mr. Clavering, for *my* sake, please."

She laid her jeweled fingers on his arm.

"I will, because you ask it! Winfred, I am surprised! To say the least, your remarks tend to display a regard for Mr. Gordeloup incompatible with maidenly delicacy."

Winnie's eyes began to flash.

"Mr. Clavering, you know I have no interest in the gentleman, and if I had, I think it would be *more* to my interest to see *her* married to you."

Her voice was clear and high, and Lillian was exulting secretly at the turn affairs had taken.

"Let us forget this. Winnie, Mr. Clavering, shake hands and be friends."

She beamed her sweetest smile on them.

"No, I will not," said Winnie, spiritedly.

"I will not forget it or forgive it, until Mr. Clavering takes back his insinuation regarding Mr. Gordeloup."

He smiled amusedly.

"You are a silly child. You had better forget this gay Mr. Harry, and prepare to meet Mr. Alvanley to-morrow. You know what we all want—what I particularly request regarding Lester."

"I never shall marry him."

"But if I should enforce it, eh?"

He laughed as he spoke.

"You could not live long enough to do that."

"Or I'd be an octogenarian? Let's drop all this talk. Winnie, we're too old friends to quarrel so. Take my arm, Lillian; Winnie, will you walk with Amy, and promise and forget?"

"I can neither promise nor forget."

## CHAPTER X.

### DISCORDANT HARMONIES.

It seemed that Winnie St. Cyr's appearance at Fernleigh was destined to continue as it had commenced; for that evening, when the entire household met in the dining-room, Mr. Lester

Alvanley had arrived. Winnie had not heard of it, as had the rest of the family, and she alone was surprised when she saw him.

He was not a handsome man, by any means, but there was an air of stylishness about him that was almost as good. He was rather grave than merry, and yet knew just what to say, and when to say it.

Generally he was a favorite with ladies; in fact, of all the women he knew, Winnie St. Cyr was the only one whom he had never been able to become very well acquainted with. True, she would laugh and talk, but that was all; by no possible stretch of imagination could Mr. Alvanley see how he would dare call her Winnie—and yet he regarded her as his future wife, and had come down to Fernleigh more because he hoped to advance his cause than from courtesy to Mr. Clavering.

Of Harry Gordeloup he knew considerable; naturally he was disposed to dislike him because he had succeeded in engaging Winnie to him, despite all the persuasions he used to prove she had no right to accept Gordeloup's attentions, on the ground of a previous engagement with him. But Winnie, with her usual independence, had scouted the idea; she would recognize no such engagement; she had never made it, and would not be held responsible for the promises of other parties. If Mr. Alvanley was disposed to keep the promise, it was simply unfortunate; she certainly never should.

So she had given herself to Harry Gordeloup; and now Lester Alvanley despised him for the part he had played toward Winnie, though how he had learned it she never knew; she only knew her lips had never condemned him.

So Lester Alvanley had come down to Fernleigh to strive again for the hand and heart of Winnie St. Cyr; he loved her with a true affection, and had Winnie loved him enough to marry him, he would have made her a good husband.

As she came into the dining-room, Harry looked up at the instant Alvanley came forward to greet her. He saw her brightened color, and ascribed it to a cause far from the truth; he noticed Alvanley's solicitous greeting, and then he saw Lillian Rothermel smile on them.

For the moment he hated her most fiercely; he saw she was still jealous of him, and maneuvering to bring about a match between Winnie and Alvanley.

Then he remembered what he had heard Winnie say so often about Lester Alvanley, and he curled his lips in contempt at the palpable scheme.

They were not a very social party that evening. Winnie went to her room early; Harry took a stroll; and Mr. Alvanley, after a



cigar with Mr. Clavering, pleaded fatigue as an excuse to retire.

Very shortly Lillian and Miss Amy went, and Fernleigh was dark and silent by eleven o'clock. The night was very warm; there seemed a storm brewing, for the stars were hid, and not a breath of air was stirring.

Winnie had been sitting beside her window all the long hours since she had come up-stairs; and now that the house was quiet, she threw a light shawl over her shoulders, and groped her way through the main hall to the front veranda. Her head was aching, but not more than her heart; she felt about her the invisible presence of some impending trouble. Was Mr. Alvanley come to torment her again? or was Lillian Rothermel, the treacherous woman she had so suddenly decided her to be—an enemy or a friend? Wrapt in her thoughts, she paid no heed to the moments, and only when a chill breeze, suddenly sweeping from the river, made her shiver, did she arise to go in again.

She had gained the upper landing, and was just opposite Mr. Clavering's door, when it suddenly opened, and Harry Gordeloup came out. Winnie shrunk back among the pillars that lined the hallway, holding her breath lest he should hear her; then, when he had entered his room, she glided noiselessly from her niche, gently closed Mr. Clavering's door, that Harry had left ajar, and entered her own apartment.

A quick rush of garments startled her, and she looked into the hall again to see who was there; but the rising wind was sweeping the curtains to and fro, and she instantly decided it was that she had heard.

So, worn with the fatigue of her journey, she laid herself down, and was immediately asleep.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE DEATH-BLOW.

SHE was awakened by an unusual commotion through the house; the sun was shining, a broad ribbon of golden light, across her room; a robin was chirping on a tree-branch near her window, and every thing out of doors was fresh and beautiful.

But there was a strange something that filled her with terror the moment she awakened—and she had awakened suddenly, from a deep sleep to perfect wakefulness with this curious terror about her.

She laughed at her nervousness and rose to dress herself, all the while wondering why the servants made such a distracting noise sweeping and dusting the halls and veranda.

Then flying footsteps, not from down-stairs, but from the floor where Mr. Clavering slept, and where Harry had his room, and Miss Roth-

ermel hers, paused at her door, followed by a quick, nervous rap.

"For God's sake, Miss St. Cyr, come down! he's dead! he's dead!"

She sprung to unlock the door, with wildest excitement leaping to her face.

It was Lillian who was outside, her face white as death, her eyes glittering with fear and grief; a long white wrapper draping her figure, and her black hair streaming adown her shoulders.

She caught Winnie's hands, and wrung them in her own.

"Oh, Winnie, Winnie, I think I am going crazy—my brain seems burning when I try to realize it."

"Who—what—who is dead?"

"Didn't I tell you it was Mr. Clavering—dead, MURDERED in his bed!"

A scream burst from Winnie's lips:

"Merciful Lord, no! Mr. Clavering—dear, old Mr. Clavering *murdered*! He had not an enemy in the world."

"But would a *friend* have done it?—oh! Winnie, pity me! kiss me, and tell me you pity me because I have lost him!"

And Winnie, pale and trembling, half-dazed at the sudden news, knelt and wound her bare arms around Lillian Rothermel's neck, and kissed her cold forehead.

"Come down, and see him. He is so tranquil, so noble—my grand lover! Winnie, I wonder if I can survive this fearful blow. And we were to be married on Thursday. I know you did not approve; but I loved him so dearly!"

She bent a sorrowfully-questioning glance on Winnie, who shook her head.

"Never mind that, Miss Rothermel; perhaps I was hasty and rude. We will forget it, and I'll pray Heaven to comfort you."

They went down the elegant velvet-carpeted stairs, silently, and walked into the chamber of mystery.

Winnie glanced up; Harry Gordeloup stood beside the bed, with Miss Amy leaning on his arm, sobbing and moaning.

Mr. Alvanley, with quiet dignity, sat beside the window.

Harry glanced up as the two women came in; Winnie met that quick, half-vexed look—and a faint cry escaped her, as she saw a tense, gray line gather around his mouth.

She grew deathly chill; her knees trembled until she feared she should fall, and Mr. Alvanley sprung to catch her swaying figure. A dull red tinge came to Harry Gordeloup's face as her eyes sought his again, and then she swooned into unconsciousness.

And all this, because, like a fatal revelation, had come to her a scathing conviction; she remembered *whom* she had met coming from the



room of the murdered man in the silent night; she knew how he loved Lillian Rothermel—the old man's betrothed!

The terrible force of this conviction, heightened by the wild, strange look in his eyes when she met them, had been too much; her consciousness mercifully gave way, and she lay in Lester Alvanley's arms, as ghostly and pallid as the dead man on his couch.

Lillian, seeing Miss Amy and Mr. Alvanley were attending to Winnie, had gone over to the bedside, and sunk on her knees, covering Mr. Clavering's hand with her eager kisses; and Harry Gordeloup smiled grimly down, thinking she would be repaid by that five thousand a year!

Already the coroner had been notified, the physicians sent for, and they were waiting for the possible explanation of the mystery.

Tranquil and still Mr. Clavering lay, his features clad in the icy dignity and grandeur that death always lends the face of a man who has gone, clear-conscienced, to his final account.

There had been no struggle; not even a contraction of a finger, or a corrugation of the forehead; only on the breast, where the linen shirt had been unfastened, was a tiny red spot; not so large as a mustard-seed, yet fearfully indicative of a mysterious foul play.

The consulting physicians found no possible cause for death in the vital organs; Mr. Clavering was a healthy, temperate man, and would have lived years yet; so, when the horrible little red spot was examined, a universal cry of horror went up.

It had been his death; a poisoned barb had been shot into his flesh; some little diabolical engine of death had done its work.

What it had been they could only speculate; enough that he was murdered—by whom?

That was the question to be settled.

Certainly a personal revenge; for not a jewel, nor a dollar of money had been touched.

But the mystery was dense as Egyptian darkness; and the verdict was rendered in accordance therewith; which only Winnie St. Cyr, in her long, deep faint, *might* have cleared up!

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE VOW OVER THE COFFIN.

The day Mr. Clavering had appointed for his wedding was selected for the funeral services.

It was deliciously clear and cool; the sun never had shone so brightly, it seemed to Lillian Rothermel, or the breeze to blow so refreshingly as on that day, when, instead of

proudly walking by his side up the wide aisle of Fernleigh church, she crept along behind him, in trailing mourning robes, and he being carried in headforemost!

That was a grief-fraught day to the family and guests at Fernleigh; and while they all bewailed the loss of Mr. Clavering, each was most tender in their sympathy for poor, stricken Lillian, whose low, plaintive sobs filled the small parish church during the service, whose utter abandonment of grief, when she kissed her dead betrothed a last good-by—it was the first kiss she ever had, unsolicited, given him—was pitiful, even in the eyes of men unused to weep.

Every one acknowledged what a blow it must be to her; people who, when they had received her wedding invitations, had sneered and called her an ambitious woman, to have so completely gotten the best of old Mr. Clavering and Fernleigh, now shook their heads, and thought how mistaken they had been in accusing her of marrying for money, when it was all for love, after all!

All but Harry Gordeloup; he sat with the friends, just beside Mr. Alvanley, and where he could see Winnie St. Cyr's bowed head and shivering form—if he had but known it was not for grief for the dead, but worse than anguish for the living, that sent those blood-curdling tremors through her veins!

But he didn't know; and it was very natural in him to attribute her emotion to the loss of such a friend as Edward Clavering had been to Winnie, and her mother before her.

So he sat there, grimly upright, yet with a certain grayness in his face that had never left it since Lester Alvanley had awakened him that fatal morning with the news. He was nervous, and he didn't attempt to deny it, either to himself or others; but the most he thought of was, Lillian was free, and an heiress, although she did not know that yet, of course.

He thought a great deal of Winnie, in between thoughts of Lillian; Winnie must despise him, he supposed, because he had been used so contemptuously by Lillian; yet, for all, he imagined there had been a vestige of the old-time affection left in her, else why her emotion that morning?

Very little of the eulogy did he hear; and not till the strangers and acquaintances had passed in solemn order around the aisles to look upon Mr. Clavering for the last time, and it remained for the party from Fernleigh to pay their sad tribute, did he fully arouse from his reverie.

Miss Amy and Mr. Alvanley had passed on toward the door; so that he, Winnie and Lillian were together, alone, by the coffin. He did not like to look at dead people—it is a



constitutional peculiarity with some persons—so, bestowing a hasty glance, and seeing more of Winnie St. Cyr's blanched face and wide eyes than Mr. Clavering's, he would have hurried on. But Lillian laid her black-kidded hand heavily on his arm.

"Wait only a moment, and you, Miss St. Cyr, to listen to the vow I make, in the solemn presence of death, and may the departed spirit of my betrothed husband hear my sworn vow—never to consider my earthly mission complete, until I have avenged his death! From his open coffin I go forth; my task is not so hard, *for I have my suspicions.*"

She fixed her eyes for a second on Harry Gordeloup's face, that, despite the occasion, flushed under the gaze once so dear to him; and Winnie, with a wild gesture of her hands, turned to go, meeting as she did, Lillian Rothermel's black eyes, as sternly as Harry had.

Lillian had attracted no attention; her voice had been low and terribly impressive; but to Winnie she had seemed like some on-sweeping Nemesis, speaking with thunderous voice.

The three walked down the aisle; Lillian entered the carriage, with Miss Amy and Winnie; Harry and Mr. Albanley occupying the next

## CHAPTER XIII.

### HARRY'S CONGRATULATION.

At Fernleigh, when the party returned, dinner was spread; afterward, they gathered in the library, where the will was to be read.

After the usual preliminaries, the legacies were announced.

To Miss Amy a generous income; to Winnie St. Cyr, five thousand dollars; to Harry Gordeloup and Lester Albanley, each three thousand dollars for their duties as executors.

To the servants, each a thoughtful remembrance; to a charitable institute, the proceeds of the sale of certain real estate.

And then—with clear, high, slowly enunciated voice, Lawyer Margrave read:

"And to Miss Lillian Rothermel, who has this day promised to be my wife, I leave the sum of five thousand dollars yearly, and the use of my town house and appurtenances so long as she lives—if, under any peculiar circumstances, I fail to keep my agreement.

"In event of our marriage, she will receive all the residue of my property, which, otherwise, will be disposed of as follows," etc., etc.

A silence, gendered by surprise, succeeded this announcement; and then, rising slowly to her feet, Lillian stared at the lawyer.

"For me—for me? Are you not mistaken? Surely I had no idea—I do not deserve this."

The tears rushed to her eyes, and her lips quivered; and there were few present who did not remark afterward: What a charming woman she was; how nobly she acted, yet with such a sorrowful humility of demeanor."

Then she glided around to Miss Amy Clavering, and leaned her head on her shoulder.

"I would have been so content to have remained in the old way; Miss Amy, I dare not accept this, dearly as I loved him. I feel I am an intruder—a robber; robbing *you* of your rights."

Was it any wonder Edward Clavering had loved her? so noble and womanly and high principled?

Miss Amy impulsively kissed the beautiful, upturned face, with its dewy lips and moist eyes.

"Take it, and be my own darling, as I know you were his; my younger sister, who will cherish me and care for me, now I am growing old."

So Lillian bowed to her destiny; a sweet, sad smile on her face as she walked gracefully back to her seat; a wild sense of exultant freedom in her soul that was laughing at its triumph!

There was little else to do after this; first came the congratulations of the lawyers, who felt it a great pleasure to take Miss Rothermel's warm, nestling hand, and tell her her good luck was nothing, in comparison with Mr. Clavering's loss, in being taken from so charming a prospect; then the friends, Winnie and Mr. Albanley, until, standing like some ebony-clad statue, yet so gloriously radiant was she in the pink flush of health and youth, she was left alone with Mr. Gordeloup. The servants had thrown open the western windows, and a narrow spear of molten sunshine slanted athwart her purple-black hair, and lying, a band of beauty, over her white throat and adown her breast—until, hindered by the cross of a gothic-backed chair that stood just before her, the sunbeam stopped, as it were, unwilling to go further; and the place where it paused was on her breast—just where the blood-red spot had marked Mr. Clavering's doom. She shivered and moved out of the light, then looked up to see Harry Gordeloup standing, with folded arms, and sternly-set lips, directly before her.

She never moved a muscle of her glorious face; not a tremor of the eyelids, nor a hurried heaving of her bosom; but she met him face to face, alone, for the first time since the day she had seen him, in this very room, when she was on her way to tell the other she would be his wife, with as calm a glance as though it had been Mr. Albanley, or any other acquaintance.



"Well" he said, at length, never moving his gaze from her face.

"You think it is well, then, Mr. Gordeloup? I do not."

He smiled at her; not the sort of smile she liked.

"You do not? I was mistaken; pardon me. I supposed since you had received your price—"

"Be still!"

She stamped her foot, and a red spot gathered on her cheeks.

"Why should I be still?" he went on, unheeding her wrath. "Once I asked you to have mercy on me, and you would not; now I must 'be still,' forsooth, because I remind you that you are a rich woman after all, and yet not Edward Clavering's wife."

He was so strange, so heartless; Lillian, with all her wrath, could see that, and she wondered whether, after all—

"Will you congratulate me? I will forgive you if you do."

She had dropped her anger, and extended her hand in her olden, witching way, looking into his eyes so earnestly.

"Congratulate you? that you have your money? and that Mr. Clavering is dead? The former, certainly."

And he walked out, never as much as noticing her hand that was still extended.

She drew a long, gasping breath, and went slowly up-stairs.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### IN THE NET.

It seemed the easiest of all things for Lillian Rothermel to glide into the position of mistress of Fernleigh; Miss Amy, fond and clinging, preferred that she should do her own will, and the servants, proud of her beauty and grace, obeyed her wishes to the letter.

The week after the funeral the house was opened and aired; Lillian assumed her position behind the coffee-urn, and the new life at Fernleigh seemed to be inaugurated without an effort.

Harry Gordeloup had gone back to his business; and without a word of adieu to any one. Winnie, now that the Florestans were still at the White Mountains, was obliged to stay; and her visit was the more agreeable because Lester Alvanley had left Fernleigh.

Not that he went to remain away; Lillian had taken good care of that, and had told him, at parting, of Mr. Clavering's wish; promising, herself, the dower to Winnie, out of her own abundance, that Mr. Clavering would have given her.

Naturally, Lester Alvanley was delighted. He loved Winnie, and intended to use all his powers of persuasion until she consented; perhaps it occurred to him, if she could not be

prevailed upon, she might be taught there was no alternative.

I said Lester Alvanley really loved Winnie St. Cyr; yet it was a thoroughly selfish love he bore her, for he was a thoroughly selfish man. Not that he would ever have permitted Winnie, through his inattention or neglect, to be an unhappy wife; yet he would use means to make her his wife that, in themselves, might distress her greatly.

So he bade her adieu at Fernleigh, not telling her he was to be Miss Rothermel's guest every Sunday during the season, and not so much as whispering a word of love to her.

He had noticed the marked difference in her manner, as well as personal appearance, those last dreadful days; he had seen the sudden nervous starting—the restless, pre-occupied air, and the quick palings and flushings if one entered the room abruptly.

While Harry Gordeloup had remained at Fernleigh, Winnie had kept her room, where Lillian often sat with her.

Afterward, she came down-stairs oftener, and seemed less agitated, although a troubled, settled sorrow seemed to enwrap her in a gloom of unspeakable density.

The days passed very quietly at Fernleigh; Miss Amy keeping her room nearly all the time; Winnie and Lillian walking while the days were pleasant, and reading when indoors. No guests were invited save Mr. Alvanley, and the calls of condolence were soon made. The opportunity had not yet, in Miss Rothermel's opinion, arrived when she decided it was best to have a plain understanding with Winnie regarding Lester Alvanley. So far as Lillian herself was concerned in Winnie's later life, in connection with the affairs of Harry Gordeloup, there never had been the first word spoken, except that remark and its beseeching answer, on the day of Winnie's arrival. Now, Lillian astutely judged that, by opening the conversation with Harry, and Harry's love affairs as concerning them both, she could get very near Winnie's heart.

It was perfectly well known to Lillian Rothermel that Winnie still loved Harry, despite his treatment of her. Lillian knew she had no idea of loving Mr. Alvanley, and therefore she knew her task was no easy one.

But she had determined that Harry should not marry Winnie; that Lester Alvanley should; and with a sort of defiant smile on her lips, she went down from her room into the bright, breezy parlor, where she knew she should find her.

Winnie was sitting in the oriel window, a piece of gay worsted work lying idly in her fingers, and her eyes gazing far out over the broad stretch of sunny woodland and meadows. There was the same restlessness in her eyes that had come there that never-to-be-forgotten day;



the same pale look under the eyes, and around the mouth, that Lester Alvanley had seen.

She smiled, however, when Lillian drew a low rocking-chair opposite her.

"I came down purposely for a nice confidential talk, Winnie. I don't have any one to converse with but you nowadays."

There was a touch of quiet sadness in Lillian's tones that made Winnie's heart go out to her.

"And I'm sure there is no one who so cordially sympathizes with you, Lillian."

"Because you knew Mr. Clavering so well, or—or—pardon me, Winnie, because we both knew Harry Gordeloup so well?"

A dull gray color slowly gathered on Winnie's cheek; how she dreaded to talk about him; what fearful memories rose up at the sound of his name!

"Because, Winnie," Lillian went on, in a sweet, deprecating voice, "I know I never deserve to be pitied by you, unless I am first sure you have forgiven me. Sometimes I wonder how I could be so cruel."

"It was for the best, perhaps." Winnie felt constrained to make some sort of answer, but she hardly knew what she was saying.

"No, it was not. It was a wicked wrong I did you, Winnie, but it has all come back to me, and you, Winnie, can marry Harry and be happy."

She made the venture, watching its effects from under her drooping eyelids.

"Marry Harry Gordeloup! Never, if I could—"

She had almost screamed out the words, and there came a fierce light in her blue eyes as she thought of him. Then she hesitated, and, with the silence, came a dull, horrid agony around her heart.

"No? Forgive me if I wounded you. I might have known you were a woman in heart, if a girl in years. And a woman never takes back a lover who has trampled on her."

Oh! what knife-blades were those words of hers; so deliberate and cruel. They were true, too, Winnie knew; Harry Gordeloup *had* trampled on her, and, Heaven help her, she would have taken him back with her open arms, and forgiven and forgotten everything, were it not that she believed him guilty of a far worse sin.

"Winnie, shall you go back to the Florestans?"

The question, coming after the highly wrought train of thought, was a relief to her.

"Certainly. What else should I do? I would not remain at Fernleigh."

"You would be welcome, I'm sure—or rather at my city residence, where I shall probably go on the first of October. I asked because I had a vague sort of idea that you would—would—"

She paused and glanced at Winnie's face.

"Well, what, Lillian?"

"I do not know that I ought to mention it; but, then, you know it was the dearest hope of Mr. Clavering's heart to have you and Mr. Alvanley married."

A little curl of amusement crept to Winnie's lips; then her face darkened; she remembered how she had spoken on that subject the last time she had seen Mr. Clavering alive.

"I could not have done it had Mr. Clavering lived. Now, there is less reason for such a distasteful step."

"Then you really dislike Mr. Alvanley so, Winnie? I think he is worthy of your affections."

"Perhaps he is; but I do not like him at all. There is the gentleman now."

Lillian arose from her seat, uttering a little exclamation of well-feigned surprise.

"Why it is Mr. Alvanley!" and she went to the front entrance to meet him.

As rapidly as she hastened to leave the parlor before he came in, Winnie was not in time to avoid seeing him. Distasteful at any time, his presence was peculiarly so now after Lillian's remarks.

Ignoring her distant coolness, Mr. Alvanley came on toward her with extended hand.

"Don't be in a hurry, Miss Winnie! I assure you I am glad to see you."

She suffered him to shake hands, and murmured some inaudible words.

Mr. Alvanley was slow to release her, and motioned toward the sofa near the bay window.

"I came down to Fernleigh purposely to ask an interview; you will grant it, Winnie?"

Could he mean anything in reference to Harry's guilt? Her cheek blanched at the thought; yet, how could *he* know what was locked in *her* bosom?

"You surely know why I came to Fernleigh at all, Winnie. Had you not been here, I should not have come, then or now. As it is, Winnie, why should you not know I desire to have you for my wife, whom I love so fondly, so truly? Winnie, think of it; remember how I can lift you to ease and luxury; remember I have waited so long. Need I wait longer?"

He had remained standing before her, his eyes steadily regarding her varying features. Then, when he had paused, she answered, suddenly, vehemently:

"No! no! Mr. Alvanley, it can never be, under any circumstances."

She rose up to go out of the room, but he caught her by the arm.

"Think of it, Winnie—for Harry's sake!"



## CHAPTER XV.

## THE SACRIFICE.

WINNIE started at those suggestive words; her eyes fairly dilated with terror as she stopped suddenly still, and with her tongue cleaving to her mouth, essayed to speak.

"For Harry's sake!" Why for his sake, Mr. Alvanley?"

How she shivered for dread of the answer, as she still looked her lover in the eyes.

A look of gloom darkened Mr. Alvanley's face; he leaned forward in a mysteriously confidential way that of itself drove her half crazy.

"Had you no idea, poor child? Did you not know that Mr. Gordeloup was seen coming out of Mr. Clavering's room about the hour of that fatal night when the deed must have been done?"

Oh! that low, insinuating voice! How Winnie wanted to crush it out, with its vile suspicions!

"Who saw him—who saw him?"

Her eager, trembling tones betrayed her anxiety even more than the rapidly-repeated question.

"That I may not answer. Suffice it that a member of the household, whose word can be depended on, saw him; and, Winnie, every one of us who were present, observed and remarked his strange, uneasy deportment."

His eyes were growing merciless, his voice hard and rasping.

"And you want me to be your wife because—"

She couldn't bring herself to utter those words that had never yet passed her lips.

"I think you fully comprehend me, Winnie. I have the power to bring Harry Gordeloup to justice, or to have the affair left as it is now. You can save him; for *your* sake he can go free, instead of to a murderer's scaffold."

There came a piercing scream from Winnie as she put her hands before her eyes, as if to shut out some fearful specter.

"Oh, Mr. Alvanley, have mercy! have mercy! Remember he is a fellow-being, whose life is so precious to him—as much as yours or mine!"

"Do you also wish me to remember how you loved him, once upon a time?"

"If it will suffice, remember how I love him still!"

She spoke almost defiantly, and Mr. Alvanley opened his eyes, in utter amazement, before he answered.

"What?"

"Yes, I do, as I never loved any one before, or ever will again!"

"Then I infer that you will do any thing in your power to save him?"

Her cheeks blanched again.

"I can not marry you—how can I, when I don't care for you?"

"Nonsense! I love you, and you will learn to love me; besides, you will have the consciousness of benefiting *him*."

Just then Miss Rothermel returned, and as she entered, fresh, cool and calm, poor Winnie rushed hotly out.

The two exchanged significant glances.

"Well?" asked Lillian.

He shook his head, yet not altogether with the air of a man who meant what he indicated.

"I do not think you need be disappointed. I *know* she will not marry *H*——. She said it, to-day, to my surprise."

"Without knowing you had seen him come out of the room?"

"Yes—at least I suppose she did not know it. Why should she?"

"Very true. Lillian, will you have a servant show me my room? I am very dusty."

He went up-stairs, and caught a glimpse of Winnie at her door, that stood sufficiently ajar to admit of the passage of a letter a maid was giving her.

Then he went on to his own room, wondering who the letter was from.

And Winnie, locking her door, began by kissing the unconscious paper with such passionate kisses that you would not have believed her capable of such emotion; then, when she had caressed it with a touching tenderness, she opened Harry Gordeloup's letter—for from him it was.

It began simply, "Winnie;" but her searching, impatient eyes, not content in reading the letter in a sensible way, glanced through and down, and the chance words, "love," "my own," "once again," "unworthy," "penitent," and the subscription, "yours till death, if it may but be," told the story.

Yes, from the depths of his humiliation and grief, Harry had written to her whom he had once loved, for balm to bind his broken heart.

How she cried; fierce sobbing grief it was, too, not more for the impotent love she bore him, than for the blood that stained his hands—the very hands that had penned those dear words.

Her whole soul went out in one great yearning for him; treacherous though he had been to her, much as she had borne for his sake.

But it never could be; the nursing of the thought was simply awful; Harry had laid his heart at her feet again, little dreaming his very life was in her hands!

How ever could he have done that fearful deed? And she felt a fierce hatred for herself that she had seen him; *but*, she had seen him, and now she could kill him if she so willed!

For an hour she sat there, reading and re-



reading his letter; then she hastily wrote an answer, not trusting herself for a second writing.

"HARRY:—I can not be your wife, now or ever. If it is any comfort to you to know I love you as well as ever I did, you are welcome to it. But I can not marry you."  
WINNIE."

She sealed it and directed it, and sent it off by the girl, fearful lest she should recall it.

Then she went down, dressed elaborately, for dinner.

Mr. Albanley was leaning against the door-post.

She went up to him, and laid her hand on his sleeve, looking full in his eyes with her deep, intense ones.

"I accept the sacrifice. To save Harry, I will marry you."

A quick gleam of joy irradiated his features.

"You will never regret it; he is sacredly safe, I swear to you, from this hour."

There were no kisses, no passionate glances of happy eyes; only a slight pressure of her little slender hand, that he knew he could crush with his clasp.

And that was Winnie St. Cyr's betrothal! who loved so, who suffered so, and who endured so!

## CHAPTER XVI.

### TWO LETTERS.

THE same mail that carried Winnie St. Cyr's refusal to Harry Gordeloup, brought him a letter from Lillian Rothermel.

He was whiling away the slow-dragging hours in his office, vainly striving to concentrate his thoughts on the plans that lay before him, when his office-boy came tearing in, and threw the two dainty missives on his table.

It was Lillian Rothermel's fine Italian hand that caught his eye first, and a great lump came in his throat despite the fact that the other letter, that lay so near it, and was superscribed in Winnie St. Cyr's elegant backhand, was an answer to an offer of marriage.

Poor fellow! he had been so guilty and sinning himself, that the being sinned against was all the harder to bear.

He did not make any attempt at opening either of the letters; but laying them side by side, planted his elbows on the desk, and then leaned his head in his hands, so that he was enabled to look down directly upon them.

He had made up his mind, this oddly compounded hero of mine, that the time had come when he must cease swaying like a pendulum, between these two women; now inclining, with all the strength of his loving yet impulsive nature, toward Winnie, and again

feeling the mad flashes of passion when he remembered Lillian Rothermel's witching beauty.

But that afternoon, after he had locked his office-door, and thrust rule and sheet out of sight, Harry Gordeloup sat down deliberately to put an end to this tumult within him.

Not that he regretted offering himself anew to Winnie; or that he had been rejected by Lillian; it was simply to put away from him such conflicting thoughts.

So he looked long and earnestly at the letters, and then, drawing a long breath, of relief almost, it seemed to him, he laid his hand gently, tenderly on Winnie's.

"I will leave my destiny in her hands. She may have spoken the word that will make a better man, and God willing, a happier man of me; she may have bade me never again address her—still I will never again have aught to do with Lillian Rothermel—never again."

After that, his mind was settled; at once and for all. Such dispositions as his have great struggles for principle and duty, but when they have once won, no mortal hand can wrest their victory from them.

So Harry tore open Winnie's letter, with a strong, steady hand, though his heart was beating faster than was its wont.

He read it all, to the end, and then laid it down; a still, calm solemnity on his features.

"It is just—I acknowledge it. But after my foul— Good Heavens! I wonder how I dare offer myself to her—but I—love—her!"

A flush had crept over his face; that faded to a dead-white shade as he made that tender, extenuating excuse.

He put her letter in his breast-pocket, and then opened Lillian's, half-disdainfully.

It was very short and hastily penciled.

"Will you come to Fernleigh to the wedding—  
—after Albanley's and Winnie St. Cyr's? I wish you would—the first week in September."

"LILLIAN."

His eyes hardly obeyed the will that made them read those words. His head was swirling round and round, and his brain would admit of but the one idea, that Winnie would not marry him, even although she loved him.

Then he crushed down the anguish. He would go to the wedding, certainly. He could just as well go as not, and he wanted to ask Winnie what it all meant, and show Lillian how lost her power was over him.

He grew quite savage with this pitifully false bravery, and thrusting Lillian's letter in the waste-basket, he strode out into the lengthening shadows of that day he had waited for.



## CHAPTER XVII.

## THE WEDDING-GUEST.

MR. ALVANLEY had desired it; Lillian had seconded it, and as she was to marry him some time, Winnie thought, what did a few weeks matter? In fact, the sooner she was Lester Alvanley's wife the surer she would be of Harry's safety.

So she wearily consented to an engagement of a fortnight. She had known Lester so long, as Lillian had said, that there was not the least impropriety in the sudden marriage. The trousseau must be very plain, and the wedding very quiet—merely a cosy breakfast after the private ceremony, on account of the recent bereavement. Then a tour to Niagara and the Lakes, and a reception at their new house in the city.

So Lillian arranged it, or suffered it to arrange itself. Winnie made no demur, for she had no like or dislike for any of Miss Fothermel's plans.

Lillian was very grave in those few days of preparation, and any one coming in suddenly upon her would find the tears gleaming on her eyelashes, and see her lips quivering as if from a great inward agony.

And Winnie pitied her, and begged her to spare herself the sight of the wedding garments, when Lillian's own lay still unworn in her wardrobe.

But Lillian only brushed the tears away, and smiled faintly.

"Dear Winnie was so considerate, so kind! But she must be permitted to do her duty, even if it almost crucified her."

And poor "considerate" Winnie felt the day lapse on that ended all her life at the Florestans; that began a never-ending sacrifice.

She had written to the Florestans, and had received their surprised congratulations, and a playful, half-vexed appeal as to why she was not married Harry Gordeloup? Ah, what!

Then, the day before the wedding, Harry came—to Winnie's horror, anguish, surprise. For Lillian had said no word until she brought the two together in her parlor.

Harry extended his hand very gravely, and Winnie, almost cowering before it, shrunk away, as though she were the guilty party, and not he.

Then Lillian introduced some everyday topic, and Winnie managed to utter a word now and then until she discovered a chance to retreat.

Mr. Alvanley lounged out under the elms, and Harry and Lillian were alone; he stern, she so tender and radiant, yet dangerous.

She was wearing deep mourning; not a tint to relieve the somberness that set off,

like a foil, her matchless loveliness. She had leaned her exquisite head against the green velvet chair, and she knew Harry was noting the effect.

In truth he was; but with far different feelings than she gave him credit for.

He felt he was hating her momentarily more and more.

And Lillian, twisting her white, unringed fingers, was so certain he was waiting for a word to bring him to her feet again. She never yet had failed in such a task, and why should she now?

She never had really loved a man in her life save this handsome Harry Gordeloup. Ambition had not drowned that love. It had only set it lightly aside. Could not the same skilled hand that had wrought the first love accomplish the second? So, with a luscious bloom upon her cheek, Lillian Rothermel turned her head toward him, resolved to win him back.

If she had but known!

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## A MAN'S SCORN.

HARRY GORDELOUP saw that graceful motion of Lillian Rothermel's head, and, by intuition, he felt she was going to probe his heart with her delightful arts. He steeled himself to it—and so the affray began.

"You received my letter—when?"

"But yesterday week, with one from Winnie."

Lillian raised her eyebrows a trifle.

"Indeed? I was not aware she had written; her time is so fully occupied now."

"Yes; that would naturally be the case."

He felt like snapping his words shorter yet, only he hardly dared.

"I am glad you came down—very glad. Fernleigh seems so lonely now, and one's dearest friends are so welcome."

Harry would not notice the dreamy look in her eyes, and the music in her voice; he tipped carelessly back in his chair before he replied.

"I would not for the world miss seeing Winnie married, after what has passed between us."

He gave that hint purposely; Lillian was not slow to improve upon it.

"I differ with you, Har—Mr. Gordeloup—no, I will say Harry, mayn't I?"

"Oh, certainly. What were you about to remark?"

"That I would not want to witness the marriage of one I had loved; it would kill me, I think—I know it would. But you men," she added, after a pause, "are so fickle, so forgetful."

"Do you think so?" he said, with a half-



scornful force. "I assure you men can love as women *never* can, and—"

He stopped short, flushing a little; and Lillian, her hot blood all fired with his negligent grace, his strong beauty, and the remembrance of what had been, went over to him, and laid her white, trembling hand on his arm.

"Tell me that again, Harry! Tell me such men as you can not only love, but forgive, forget, and love again! Oh, Harry! Harry! can I ever atone?"

She was so beautiful; her tender, moist eyes and varying cheeks; her rare, red lips apart, and her hands lying, warm, importunate, on his own.

Was it a wonder Harry Gordeloup reveled in his glorious triumph? Was it strange he felt a wild thrill of exultant joy that this regal creature was suing to him?

He suffered a smile to play on his lips; but Lillian, her keen eyes clouded with tears, her whole armor of penetration and defense cast aside for the garments of love wherewith she had clothed herself, did not read it aright.

"Then you'll take me back again, Harry? and I'm not ashamed to plead for myself, to *you*. You said 'men can love as well as women,' Harry, 'and—' and then you stopped. What were you going to say?—'forgive?'"

How strangely humble she was; how perfectly it became her; but Harry's heart steeled under it all.

Then he suddenly flung her entreating hands away.

"Forgive? No! I would have said 'hate, despise, scorn!'"

His low, hard voice came hissing to her wondering ears. She bent her royal head a moment, as if doubting the evidence of her senses; she swayed to and fro an instant, and then the motion changed to a writhe of bodily agony, keener than she could endure.

Then, like a lightning-flash, she drew her slender figure to its utmost height; her eyes gleamed with a steely fridity; tiny purple specks dotted her face, and a pale blackness gathered around the corners of her lips.

"I never shall forget this. Triumph in your petty revenge, but remember, the day shall come when you will writhe in my grasp, and curse this hour!"

Harry smiled contemptuously, and swung round on his heel to meet Winnie, who had come down, hoping to escape to the garden from the oppressive heat of the house.

"Winnie, I am going with you, may I? Only a moment."

Utterly ignoring Lillian's presence, he sauntered beside her, glancing at Winnie, who was fluttering along, dreading lest he should mention his offer and her refusal, which were the very first words he spoke.

"Why did you do it, Winnie? I dare not

say 'Winnie darling,' as my heart prompts me to, but why, if you still love me, will you marry Lester Alvanley?"

He would have taken her hand, but she shrunk away.

"Oh, Harry, don't! I can't tell you—be assured it is all for the best! indeed, indeed, it is for the best!" and she darted away and ran weeping to her room!

How *could* he be guilty?—that honest-eyed man who had been so pityingly looking at her! And yet not only *she*, but another witness had seen him! How her heart was crushing, crushing under that cruel weight!

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE FATAL MESSAGE.

THE wedding had been, as Lillian intended, very quiet and quite aristocratic; Winnie had been very lady-like and gentle, and Mr. Alvanley jubilant and proud.

Harry Gordeloup had staid at Fernleigh, with a sort of stubborn delight, and Lillian was obliged to comport herself in a manner worthy her position.

They had exchanged no words, save those of common courtesy, and when the bridal party departed, Harry went with them so far as New York, where they bade adieu.

Those days at Fernleigh had been almost unendurable to Lillian Rothermel, since Harry Gordeloup had so signally triumphed over her; and not only defeated her—that she might have borne—but she had been trampled on, into the very dust.

Her pride was outraged; her love utterly killed; her wrath fired; and Harry little recked of the fiendish revenge she would one day wreak on him.

He went back to the dull routine of office life, with Winnie Alvanley's haunting face always floating before him; with a consciousness of utter loneliness, because there was not, in all this world, one woman whose eyes would brighten at his approach, at whose lips he might claim a lover's kiss.

He had always been used to that sort of thing; he had been too impressionable not to have found many friends among the many pretty girls who greeted him with their smiles.

But, now, there were none worth wasting a thought over; he had flitted from flower to flower, in a guileless way—or, in plainer words, Harry had been an egregious flirt—and now, the only flower he wanted he could not have.

So he went to work, as I said, very lonely, and resolved to wed himself to his business.

He was all the better for this trial that came upon him; generally such tribulations refine us and purify us, and never come when they're



not needed, unwelcome as they seem; unwelcome as they are.

And while he was working away, honestly striving to wean himself from all remembrances of Winnie Alvanley, she and husband were abroad on their wedding tour—over the very ground she had once arranged to travel with Harry when they should be married; and the only comfort of her life, as she endured on and on, was that she was suffering of her own will for him!

All through sunny September the bridal pair journeyed and tarried; Lillian Rothermel thought and schemed and racked her brain for a way to punish Harry Gordeloup; and Harry, grown saddened and strengthened through suffering, was, perhaps, the happiest of them all.

That is, in a certain sense, as regarded Winnie and himself; but, when he thought of Lillian Rothermel, and from her to Edward Clavering, he would sometimes dash his pencil on the floor, and pace restlessly to and fro, his breath seeming to come in spasmodic jerks.

He dreamed about it, too, and lived it all over again, that dreadful night of nights; he remembered how sultry it had been all day, and how suddenly wind had arisen about one o'clock. He remembered Lillian Rothermel's witching loveliness as she came flying down-stairs in answer to the wild alarm the servant had given, with her little bare, dimpled feet, and her hair streaming over her shoulders and bosom. Then he grew soul-sick, and forcibly blinded memory's eyes to the picture he had conjured.

October, with its light frosts and sunny noons, saw Mr. and Mrs. Alvanley settled in their new home—a fine mansion that Lester had built for speculation and then reserved for his own use.

It was furnished most completely throughout, and had Winnie loved her husband, she would have been perfectly delighted and contented.

As it was, she compelled herself to be quietly satisfied; to her husband she was always respectful and kind, yet she never could forget the price he had demanded of her for another.

To her numerous callers she was the elegant, courteous Mrs. Alvanley, whom they went away admiring and not unfrequently envying!

Before her guests, dear Miss Amy Clavering and Lillian Rothermel from Fernleigh, she attempted no disguises; she was simply herself, a heart-sick, heart-sore woman, trying to be brave.

And she *was* brave, with a heroic courage many a man might well be jealous of; *silently* brave, going on in her self-elected path.

Her husband loved her, after his selfish fashion. She was very pretty and he was

glad people admired her. She was undoubtedly refined and stylish, and though frigid to an unheard-of degree, still Lester Alvanley was very proud to introduce her—"My wife, Mrs. Alvanley."

She found no fault at all. And then, one of the bright Christmas holidays, a sudden end came.

Mr. Alvanley had gone with a friend on a business tour to Europe, and had been suddenly seized with a terrible disease—the small-pox—then raging in London. Both he and his friend died, and were buried, and word sent home to their widows.

It was a fearful shock; not for love's sake, but because of the suddenness of it.

Mrs. Alvanley and Lillian had been sitting alone in the drawing-room when the telegram from London to Mr. Alvanley's partner came.

It was brief, and so heartless. Whenever was a telegram otherwise?

"Mr. Lester Alvanley died this morning of small-pox. Will be buried to-morrow."

That was all. But Winnie read and re-read it with fascinated eyes, and then, drawing a long, troubled breath, that quivered and fluttered, like a wounded bird, as it escaped her pale lips, she began to cry—the first tears she had shed since she had written that letter to Harry Gordeloup. Oh, a thousand years, alack, it seemed.

Lillian snatched up the paper Winnie's nerveless fingers had let drop, and a second glance told her the news.

She murmured some inarticulate sounds, some awful, passionate words, that would have curdled Winnie's blood, had she heard them, and then she threw her arms around the widowed wife's neck, and whispered comfort.

## CHAPTER XX.

### A LOVE-LETTER.

THOSE days of Winnie Alvanley's widowhood would have been the happiest she had experienced since the time she and Harry Gordeloup had been lovers, were it not for the ever-haunting fact of the motive that had made her what she was.

It was a sorrow that had grown to be a settled trouble, and a cloud over her, never to be lifted, for by what atonement of his own could his hands be cleansed of blood?

Latterly, during the six months that had elapsed since Lester's death, Winnie had been fearful lest that *others*, whom her husband had never mentioned, who also knew of Harry's guilt, would bring the affair to notice. Who it was, she knew not how to ascertain, and so the old fear came back heavily as ever.

Harry Gordeloup had called several times on her since her husband's death, but she had persistently refused to see him, and then from a



sense of her own weakness, lest she might be persuaded, she clutched gladly at the idea that she and Miss Amy Clavering, and Lillian, should travel for a year on the Continent.

So it had been hastily arranged, apparently; though Lillian Rothermel might have told how she had concluded that the best plan to prevent the possibility of renewed friendship between Harry and Winnie would be to effectually separate them for a long time; not that she had any lingering hopes of herself winning Harry Gordeloup, but that she was resolved Winnie should not.

The elegant mansion on Fourteenth street was closed, and the party sailed for England, getting on as far as Switzerland in the early autumn, where they proposed remaining several weeks.

Lillian Rothermel had grown to be the leading member of the little party. She it was who gave the orders, arranged for the walks, and advised Miss Amy and Winnie when they had better remain indoors.

She was very thoughtful of Winnie's comfort, until Winnie had fully come to believe her best friend was Lillian Rothermel, after all, though she never was quite reconciled to her first wrong-doing in taking Harry from her.

Sometimes she felt her heart steeling against Lillian Rothermel; then she reproached herself, for the kindnesses Lillian was so constantly evincing toward her disarmed her, just as Lillian intended they should.

Lillian often went out alone; and both the ladies at home remarked, more than once, at the exuberant flow of spirits and the warm, rich color that the mountain air gave her.

Lillian would laugh, and thank them for their graceful compliments.

Quietly, evenly, the year of absence went on; and when Winnie sat down in her own parlors once more, with her mourning robes laid aside, she concluded it had not been altogether unpleasant. She was at Fernleigh often, as the genial spring days came on apace; where, as of yore, Lillian reigned power supreme.

"You are looking better than ever before since I knew you," Winnie had one day remarked to Miss Rothermel, who was sitting thoughtfully in the library, with an open letter—a foreign one—before her.

"Yes; I feel better than before our tour. Crossing the ocean is generally beneficial, I believe."

She spoke in a dreamy sort of way, as if her thoughts had returned over the water.

A quaint little smile came to Winnie's lips, and she pointed significantly to the letter. A flush of deep crimson mounted Lillian's face; and she instinctively covered it with her fingers.

"There is no need; I have fathomed your little secret long before these letters came so regularly from Switzerland. Ah! Lillian, it was not the mountain air that made you so jubilant so much as the lover's caresses!"

A sudden smile broke over Lillian's face; she looked a moment, with her keenest glance, at Winnie, and then a low, delicious laugh came rippling from her lips.

"You sly puss! How came you to discover my only secret, and I thought it was so well guarded?"

"Do you think, then, no one saw the joyous light of your eyes of late? or noted the quiet, meditative mood from which you always awakened with such satisfied, perfect-content smiles on your lips? Ah! Lillian! love writes its signals on your face."

A proud, almost overpoweringly exultant light was in Lillian's eyes as she listened.

"Then, you are sure it is love? Nothing else would render me so completely happy, so far as looks go?" she said, inquiringly.

"I am sure; and yet, dear Lillian, I do not seek to pry into your confidence. But, if you will let me, I will offer my best prayers for your success and happiness, in connection with this."

She touched the letter that lay in Miss Rothermel's hand, addressed in a bold, elegant style.

A curious expression came over Lillian's face; almost a look of passionate eagerness.

"I hope your wishes may be realized. They shall be, if my life is spared—and his."

She glanced down at the letter, indicating whom she referred to.

It was rather of an odd answer to make to Winnie's congratulations, but she only wondered at it for a moment, as she bent and kissed Lillian Rothermel's polished, marble-white brow, then went silently out.

Lillian snatched the letter half fearfully from her lap and thrust it in her bosom.

"Heavens! if she knew what that contained! And her hopes for my success! pitiful little thing that she is! I'd scorn to measure lances with her were it not for him!"

This time she did not mean the writer of the letter; but her glittering eyes wandered afar off over the tree-tops in the direction of the faintly gleaming spires that marked the city where Harry Gordeloup was working so hard, so bravely.

There was a green gleam in her eyes that boded no good; for Lillian Rothermel had remembered her vow of vengeance, and she was a woman not to forget.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE CONFESSION.

It was the next morning that Winnie Al-



vanley was sitting in her bedroom, with a dainty piece of sewing lying idly on her willow work-stand, and her eyes, where the tears stood ready to fall, re-reading a note she had received in that room so long, long ago.

She folded it away with a weary sigh, and looked up to see Lillian Rothermel standing beside her, grave, yet smiling kindly down into her tear-dimmed face.

She felt the hot flushes rise to her cheeks under Lillian's gentle scrutiny, and she nervously attempted to resume her sewing.

But Lillian drew it from her fingers.

"No, I came up purposely to have a little confidential talk with you; and that letter I found you reading I verily believe will lead me to the subject I wish to announce."

Lillian had taken one of Winnie's hands in her own, and was softly smoothing the white, taper fingers.

A half-frightened, appealing look sprung up in Winnie Alvanley's eyes.

"You are kind—very kind, Lillian—to manifest such an interest in my affairs; but don't ask me about it, please!"

She was so afraid lest she should whisper the faintest suspicion of her terrible secret—at least a secret from Lillian, she knew.

Lillian raised her eyebrows inquiringly.

"About 'it'? What? I was only going to ask you this simple question, that I know you'll forgive from me, because I have so often repented of *my* sin regarding it."

A cold shiver curdled through Winnie's veins; whenever Harry Gordeloup was mentioned, even so indirectly, she felt just so.

"You are free now, dear Winnie, and naturally you will marry again. I know you love Harry Gordeloup—why not marry him?"

A little moaning cry came from Winnie's lips and the tears came now, fast and free, urged on by a sore, bleeding heart.

"Lillian! Lillian! in mercy, don't! You don't know—you are stabbing me so!"

"No, I am not. I am doing you the greatest earthly favor I can. Will you listen, Winnie, while I talk calmly, dispassionately, of Harry Gordeloup? I can do so, and I loved him once. Surely, you can, when you've but to say the word and he will kneel at your feet, the happiest man living."

Winnie shook her head.

"You don't know, Lillian, any thing about it."

"But I do. I know more than you do, more than ever Lester Alvanley did. There, does that interest you?"

A wild, intense thrill of something she hardly could define sprung up in Winnie's breast; she felt her heart slowing its beats, while she waited.

"I take the greatest pleasure in telling you,

Winnie, because I think I once wronged you almost beyond reparation; but to make atonement I will tell you that Lester Alvanley was most awfully mistaken when he suspected Harry Gordeloup of the murder of Mr. Claverling. He told me himself, not a month after your marriage."

Winnie's eyes never blenched from staring on Lillian's moving lips; she had clasped her hands in a fierce hold, and now sat as if enchanted.

"I told Mr. Alvanley not to undecieve you at that late hour; he had confessed he used that honest suspicion of his to win you, and I knew, amid all my grief and just anger, that it would only make matters worse for you to know. Since then I have only waited a proper time, hoping you would fly to Harry when you learned the truth."

"But I saw him, myself, come out of that fatal room! Oh, Lillian, you are so cruel! so cruel!"

"Winnie, I know Harry was in Mr. Claverling's room, probably not an hour before the deed was done; but I also know why he went, how long he stayed, and when he came out; besides, Winnie, I was through his room *myself*, after Harry had gone back to bed. I went to see if Miss Amy, whose room adjoins, was comfortable."

Then Winnie sprang to her feet, and clutched Lillian's arm till it purpled under her nails.

"What? what? and Mr. Claverling was well when you went through?"

"Sleeping comfortably. Perhaps you think it was unmaidenly for me to enter his room; but what was I to do? Miss Amy's door was locked, and I knew she called me."

"I think of nothing but that my Harry is not a guilty man! Oh, thank God, thank God for that!"

She walked up and down the room, weeping and laughing by turns, until Lillian's calm, dispassionate language quieted her down, and she left her in a trance of deepest, stillest joy.

There was that same strange green gleam in Lillian Rothermel's eyes as she went down the stairs, and the same cruel, pitiless smile hovering on her lips.

But Winnie did not know aught, but that she was free to marry him whom she had loved first, last, always! She walked over to her writing-desk and penciled a note.

"Harry, my own, own Harry, will you let me be your wife at last? May I love you? Will you come and get me? Oh, Harry, my darling, I am so ecstatically happy!"

She inclosed the letter he had written her months ago, and then sat down to realize, for the first time in so many weary days, what it meant to be happy!



## CHAPTER XXII.

## THE LIGHT OF LOVE.

IN the same office where he had been at work that warm summer day, two years ago, Harry Gordeloup was sitting when Winnie Alvanley's letter was thrown carelessly on his desk.

He was changed somewhat; his face wore a more stern expression, and his beard had grown longer, making him look older, while it added, rather than detracted, from his appearance.

He had been true to his word; he had completely gotten over his brief infatuation for Lillian Rothermel, and learned to regard his disappointment concerning her a just reward for his cruelty to Winnie.

When he had learned of Lester Alvanley's death, his heart had leaped to his mouth; now, he would get Winnie after all; and his surprise was only equaled by his grief at being refused by her even an interview.

When she had gone to Europe, he had given her up; there was no struggle, only a gradual closing of the light and hope that had cheered him even while she was the wife of another. Then, like a rocket-burst, came her letter. At first, he thought it was a cruel trick—and he remembered Lillian Rothermel's wrath once upon a time—but when he saw his own inclosed, he knew the light had broken in upon him; so brilliant and dazzling, that it blinded, while it rejoiced him.

He did not trust to an answer; he took the first train out for Fernleigh, and reached there just as the family were sitting down to dinner.

All dusty and jaded with the railroad travel, he rushed up to Winnie, who had arisen to meet him, with a low cry of joy.

"My own! my own!"

It seemed the burden of his heart, and he took her in his arms and kissed her again and again, utterly regardless of the presence of Lillian or Miss Amy, who, with discreet kindness, slipped through the French window after some more flowers.

Pale, calm, lady-like, Lillian went up to him.

"Harry, I beg you to forgive me for what transpired the last time I saw you. I am sorry. I ask you to pardon me; we need be enemies no more. Can we not be friends for her sake?"

She laid one hand on his, and another on Winnie's whose happy eye stole pleadingly to his.

"Oh, yes, Harry; Lillian must be our best, dearest friend. But for her, this never would have been!"

She clung to his arm; and he, in the fullness of his strength of joy, gave his hand to Lillian.

"We will forget and forgive, Lillian."

She threw him a lightning glance of thankfulness and kindness; in her heart she grew elated and exultant and more merciless than ever! So they sealed the compact, and Winnie's new life began.

She wondered where the days and the weeks that followed went to; it seemed only a light, beautiful dream, and one morning she found her wedding-day had come! She was strangely restful and happy, yet, withal, a trifle grave that day; she was remembering another wedding-day, and another bridegroom, and then she turned with a cry of delight to Harry, who was watching her.

"We'll be all the happier, my own one, for the dark clouds that enveloped us so long. The sun is always the more welcome after a long storm."

And so it seemed their life would be; bright, joyous and peaceful; they went over the self-same ground that Winnie had trodden before on her first wedding tour, for she wished it to be so, and from the very first, her lightest wish was Harry's greatest delight to perform. Of all the favors she asked in her sweet, old-time way, there was one she had begged, with serious face, and quivering red lips. It was that Harry never would ask her *why* she had refused him once and married Lester Alvanley.

And he, well content enough that he had her at last, smiled and promised, and decided it was her affair, not his.

They were thoroughly happy in their married life; they sold Mr. Alvanley's residence and went to board at Fernleigh for the summer, at Lillian's request, and the world seemed nothing but brightness to the husband and wife, who had, next to each other, learned to love Lillian best.

And she, when no one saw her, would clench her white hands and hiss curses on them for their happiness; and then laugh horribly when some sudden thought came to her!

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## THE BLOW.

A PLEASANT winter's evening, just before the holidays; Lillian Rothermel and Winnie Gordeloup, sitting under the gaslight, their fingers busy in preparing the little love-tokens that the coming season called for.

Harry was lounging on the sofa, a half-read evening paper in his hands, his eyes really watching the two ladies, and one of them with particularly loving interest.

A sort of calm quiet had fallen upon them; Lillian was in a meditative humor, and Winnie was content with the frequent love-telegrams from Harry.

The door-bell rung suddenly, with such sharp, successive peals that Winnie involun-



tarily started from her chair, while Harry laughed at her nervousness.

"It's the boy with the worsted from the city, I think. Shall I see?"

But Lillian's kind offer was not answered, for a quick, firm step came echoing along the hall.

"Who can it be—no one should come up that way. Harry, dear, see, will you? That fellow of Kinney's—"

Winnie turned toward the door as it opened; and a quick, horrible cry finished her sentence.

"Oh, my God!"

Then she fell back into Lillian's arms, whose lips were pallid and eyes dilated.

For there, flushed and travel-stained, stood Lester Alvanley!

Harry sprung to his feet and confronted him, speechless from the awful shock; then, after a moment, he staggered backward to the sofa, and leaned his head upon his hands.

"And this is the way I find my wife, is it?"

His voice went thundering through the room, and brought the suddenly-smitten light into Harry's eyes, the fire into his heart.

"Your wife? Never! by all that is holy, never! She is *mine* before heaven and earth!"

Lester Alvanley's devilish laugh rung out low and terrible.

"We'll contest that, Mr. Gordeloup. In the mean time, Miss Rothermel, I am pleased to see you."

He extended his hand, but she shrunk away.

"No! no! Mr. Alvanley, in mercy leave us. Indeed she is Harry's wife!"

"I am sorry I can't agree. Winnie—Winnie!"

His voice grew tender, and he laid his hand lightly on her forehead. She shivered, even though but partly conscious.

"Take your hand off her!" thundered Harry.

"Mr. Gordeloup," and Mr. Alvanley turned quietly around and faced the horrified husband, "there is no need of a quarrel in this affair. *Of course* I expect to claim my wife, even if she has unfortunately supposed herself to be yours. I am prepared to offer any equivalent to you—not because I am obliged to, but for the loss you must sustain—for I shall not for a moment dream of relinquishing *my* claim on her."

Harry listened with a ghastly face and sinking heart; he knew Lester Alvanley's wife was not his—oh, Heavens! *had never been!*—and he looked pitifully toward Winnie, who opened her eyes and saw only him.

"Harry, who was it that frightened me so? I thought—"

Then her frightened eyes, that had peered around the room, caught the awful sight

again; and, with a scream, she flew to Harry's arms.

"He must not have me! Oh, Harry, you won't let him have me! I'll go with you; I *can't* be his again!"

Shivering, weeping, she clung to his arm; and he, scarcely less moved, pressed her tightly to him.

"You shall not leave me, my own darling Winnie! You are mine in the sight of God, if not of man, and I swear I never will desert you!"

But his voice was husky, and Winnie felt his heart throbbing madly against her.

"Mrs. Alvanley," Lester said, so dispassionately and coolly that her heart quaked, "I am sorry to find my place so preferably filled. I have brought home, after years of sickness, danger, shipwreck, a whole heart; and I expected to find the same. But, whether it is or not, my duty, urged by a very natural inclination, for which I am sure even Mr. Gordeloup cannot censure me, leads me to re-establish what seems to be my forgotten rights."

Then Lillian, who had been very quiet and agitated, spoke:

"But leave us for the present, Mr. Alvanley. You see Winnie's nervous condition—leave her to my care and her husband—Mr. Gordeloup's."

Alvanley smiled grimly.

"A fine idea, truly! However, since *my* wife seems really agitated by my presence, I will say good-night, provided that Mr. Gordeloup accompanies me. Of course he will prefer to go, seeing that he has no legal right to stay."

How conscious he was of his superior power over them! how every word stabbed Harry's heart afresh! how Winnie clung weeping and praying to him!

Little wonder was it that Lillian Rothermel's face was pallid, and her eyes glowing fiercely.

Harry gently disengaged his wife's clinging arms.

"It is true, my darling, that I have no right to you—for the present, at any rate. I will go, but try and be calm. Remember it is only a question of time—any court in the land will give you a divorce from Mr. Alvanley."

Lillian started—was she thinking of the exposures and disgrace of the divorce court? but Lester only smiled contemptuously.

"As I said, I'll contest that. Miss Lillian, good-night. Winnie, my dear, this is a cool welcome for a return after three years; however, adieu."

He would have taken her hand, but Harry savagely interposed.

"Wait till you've proved your claim to that much."



And Mr. Alvanley returned to his hotel, where the news had been broken to him, his face wearing a strange smile as he lit a cigar and slowly smoked it.

And Harry Gordeloup, torn with bitter grief, walked the grounds all night, watching the light in Winnie's window till it paled in the light of day.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### A MASK UNMASKED.

LILLIAN ROTHERMEL was invaluable in her thoughtful kindness for Winnie, during all that long, terrible season of agony that followed the return of Lester Alvanley. The community at large was no less shocked than was the unfortunate woman herself; and certainly no less demonstrative in Mr. Gordeloup's favor than was Winnie herself.

For days and nights Winnie neither ate nor slept, but paced the floor of her room in silent, consuming agony. Of her own course she had no doubt, so far as her heart might lead her; never, *never* again would she live with Lester Alvanley; let all the powers of earth attempt to persuade or coerce her and she would resist. Sooner than go back to the old life she would die; there would be rest then, at the least.

She had been too happy as Harry Gordeloup's wife; she often had wondered, even, amid the peaceful sunshine, if another woman lived who was so blest as she; and now, that the thunder-cloud had burst on her, from so clear a sky, apparently, she remembered her past happiness with a still keener anguish.

Besides herself, she suffered for Harry, her tender, devoted husband; and she fiercely repeated the endeared word; he was her husband, for all that other had risen from the dead to mock her. To Harry she had sworn to be loyal and true; to him she would turn in this affliction, let who might cast their scornful looks upon her. She felt her own soul clear, and what mattered all else?

To Lillian she poured out her whole heart; it was on Lillian's shoulder she wept her bitter tears; from Lillian's tender lips she heard the advice her own heart throbbed an assent to.

Then, one morning, Mr. Alvanley demanded an interview of her; and she went to see him, as one might meet a stranger—or an enemy.

"Where is the use of your fighting against me? I am the stronger, the more determined, and, by the powers that be, Winnie, I will not give you up."

She stood before him, pale, silent as a ghost; only the slumbering light in her deep violet eyes gave token of the fires within.

"By Jove, Winnie, I doubt if a fellow was

ever in love with his wife as I am with you! You're a thousand-fold handsomer than when I went away."

His admiring gaze brought a dull glow to her pallid cheeks; but her lips curled.

"Your fulsome flattery is simply ill-timed. What is it you wish of me?"

He laughed, and leaned carelessly back in the arm-chair.

"That's rich, isn't it? What *should* I want, if not to call you my own again? Of course I've come to tell you it's all settled, and I have sent for my luggage from New York. When you leave Fernleigh, we'll find another boarding-place."

A curdling shiver ran over her to hear this man assume his rights. Was it true?

"I never shall leave Fernleigh with you, Mr. Alvanley. I acknowledge no fealty to you more than to the veriest stranger on the earth; *but*, if the cruel laws of this country *can* force you upon me, rest assured their power lies only in words; for, Lester Alvanley, so sure as there is a Heaven above to protect me, so sure will I never, *never* be aught to you!"

She was trembling, yet she felt her heart strong within her; momentarily, now that her defiant stand was taken, something within her whispered courage and hope.

His own eyes grew dangerously bright, and Winnie saw a pallor gather around his mouth, as he partly rose from his chair.

"Do you dare defy me—*me*, your lawful husband? You scorn me—*you*, the illegitimate wife—"

"Enough!" she cried. Your lying lips have proven your vile heart; *but* if, as you say, I *am* the unlawful wife of Harry Gordeloup, such will I be to the latest days of my existence, in preference to a life with *you*! Are you satisfied now?"

How glorious she was, defending her own pure self, and she read aright the passion gathering in Mr. Alvanley's eyes.

"By Heaven, I am *not* satisfied! It maddens me to hear you! and I'd sooner take your life from you than let you give it to that poltroon—"

His sentence was ended by a staggering blow that sent him reeling across the room, and Winnie sprung to Harry Gordeloup's open arms, as he stood there, his face deadly white with just indignation.

"You are a gentleman, are you not? A fine specimen of manhood, to come here in my absence and insult this lady!"

Harry glowered down on the man, as he sprung to his feet, all ablaze with passion.

"You'll rue that, sir! You'll—"

"Not a word!" said Harry, as he held his arm tightly about Winnie's trembling form. "I forbid further intrusion upon Mrs. Gorde-



loup's presence until I resign her to you—which, I think, will be some time yet, *if ever*, judging by the advice of my lawyer."

A startled look came to Mr. Alvanley's eyes, but he forced it away.

"You can't frighten me with your bugaboos!"

"I've no desire to, as I conclude your alarm will come soon enough. Winnie, my darling, will you get your hat and sacque, and return with me to New York? I have secured rooms for us—"

"By Jove, you dare not! I'll have a policeman at your heels, you villain, if you attempt such a wholesale outrage!"

Harry smiled carelessly.

"Be as quick as you can, dear. The carriage is in waiting. Let your maid accompany us."

Winnie's face lighted.

"So gladly, so thankfully, I'll go, Harry! What shall I say to Lillian?"

A sudden black frown, so intense that she almost started, came to Harry's face.

"You need make no explanations to Miss Rothermel. She and this gentleman can arrange their affairs."

His voice was hard, merciless, and Winnie intuitively knew there was good reason for his strange conduct.

Mr. Alvanley arose, rather nervously, after Winnie had gone to prepare herself for the ride to the city.

"I will not remain under this roof a moment longer; were it my own I should eject *you*; as it is, I am rather a victim of circumstances, but I can bide my time."

He walked toward the door just as Winnie came in, followed by Lillian Rothermel, who looked anxiously, even fearfully around.

"No!" yelled Harry, catching Mr. Alvanley's arm and jerking him back violently. "You do not leave Fernleigh just yet. Officer, here's your man!"

A detective, accompanied by two policemen, sprung through the French window, and in a second had secured him, Winnie and Lillian looking on in wild-eyed amazement.

"Harry! Harry! what does it mean?"

It was Lillian Rothermel's sweet, terrified voice that asked the question as she clung to his arm.

"Don't defile me, woman, with your polluted hands!" and he flung them off. "It means that *you* are found out—you have been tracked to your lair, you tigress you! Ah! Winnie, see her guilt, her deceitful treachery, her duplicity, on her face!"

For a moment Lillian had straightened herself proudly, indignantly; then she grew stony-eyed and rigid; and at last, when Harry had pointed his finger at her, she had sunk, groveling, a heap on the floor.

Winnie sprung to her assistance, but Harry held her firmly back.

"No, dearest; she is not fit for you to touch; her heart is vile beyond conception, and her hands are red with blood—the blood of Edward Claverling!"

A fearful shriek burst from Lillian's lips, and she struggled to her feet.

"It's a lie, a foul, false—"

Then a bright tinge of blood stained her lips, that made her hideous in her ghastly paleness; faster the life-current oozed out between her fast-set teeth, but she still essayed to speak; in an awful, gurgling voice.

"It is a diabolical lie, Harry—Gordeloup! You know—I—loved you—hated you—"

And then the thick stream issuing from the blood-vessel broken in the fury of passion and strength of fear, spurted out a fiery torrent—and with it the life of Lillian Rothermel.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE REVELATION.

SOLEMN, even unto the silent horror of the grave, the men looked down on the dead face that lay upturned on the emerald carpet; and Winnie, moaning and almost fainting, lay in her husband's arms.

Harry's low, impressive voice broke the awful stillness.

"Mr. Leslie Alvanley, on condition of confessing your complicity with that woman—and he looked at Lillian's dead face again—"and acknowledging that you are *not* Lester Alvanley, my wife's first husband, but a twin-brother, named Leslie, whom Miss Rothermel accidentally met in Switzerland and hired to play the part of your dead brother, giving you all necessary instructions therefor—you will be allowed to return to Europe with no further punishment than your own guilty soul will carry."

Mr. Alvanley had undergone a complete change during these few tragic moments.

"It is true—all true—all true, I swear," he hurriedly said, with chattering teeth, as he glanced askance at Lillian's body.

"And you'll never return to America again, under penalty of the utmost rigor of the law. Now, sir, go!"

He was not slow to take advantage of Harry's mercy, and then Winnie and her husband summoned the household and explained, leaving the remains of the guilty woman in charge of the police, in the very house where she had, but so shortly before, wrought a horrible deed, little recking how it would rebound on her own proud head.

Skillfully had she hidden the traces of her crime; and but for one misstep she made, one that seemed unworthy of her, consummate



plotter that she was, her guilt would have died with her.

But Harry's had been the hand to unravel the mystery—his, guided by a God who had declared Vengeance belonged to him alone for repayment—that God who has since crowned Harry Gordeloup's life with brightest coronals of earthly rejoicing.

It had occurred this way: anguish-stricken, Harry had gone to the library that night when Mr. Alvanley had made his sudden and blighting appearance.

For hours he had walked the floor in tumult of spirit devising all manner of plans to relieve Winnie of the fate he believed before her, when he suddenly remembered a pamphlet of laws on such subjects that Mr. Clavering had possessed.

He began a search for it, impatient for the morning that would take him to his lawyer.

He could not find it; he stumbled over drawers, and found himself in unknown recesses and compartments, where, as if an angel finger was guiding him, he struck against a carved acorn in the side of the huge secretary, that snapped like a percussion-cap, and flew open, revealing—

Good heavens! amid all his troubles, all the crushing weight of his own agony, he felt the blood curdle round his heart.

There lay a tiny silver weapon, and on the barb that was used instead of a ball, was a speck of blood, dried and dull, while a little above was a dull green blur.

What could it be but the poisoned instrument that had caused Mr. Clavering's death?

Beside it was a scarlet-bound book, locked with a golden clasp, that all his strength could not undo; that a blow from the iron pin-rack burst apart.

It did not need many moments' reading to convince him of the horrible truth that Lillian Rothermel had heard Mr. Clavering's remark to himself regarding the terms of the will in her favor, and that she deliberately took his life, that she might win Harry back to her.

It was soul-freezing to read it; and then, further on, was a full account of her accidental meeting with Leslie Alvanley, whom she had recognized as Lester; the mutual explanations; her successful terms with him to aid her in working ruin and wrong where she had resolved to do it.

She remarked how blind were Miss Amy and Winnie, who attributed her exuberant spirits to the mountain air, and when at home, to her love-letters from Switzerland! and the while it was the delicious results of this sleepless vengeance of hers.

Armed with these infallible proofs, Harry saw he could, at one blow, sweep all clouds from his own and Winnie's path forever.

The result we have seen.

Lillian Rothermel, whose revenge had led her into a most daring attempt, had but given into Harry's hand the weapons to destroy herself, whereas she intended he should be utterly despoiled of all he cherished.

To-day Lillian Rothermel's grave is unknown, unloved, unhonored, while Winnie and Harry are tasting life's choicest sweets.